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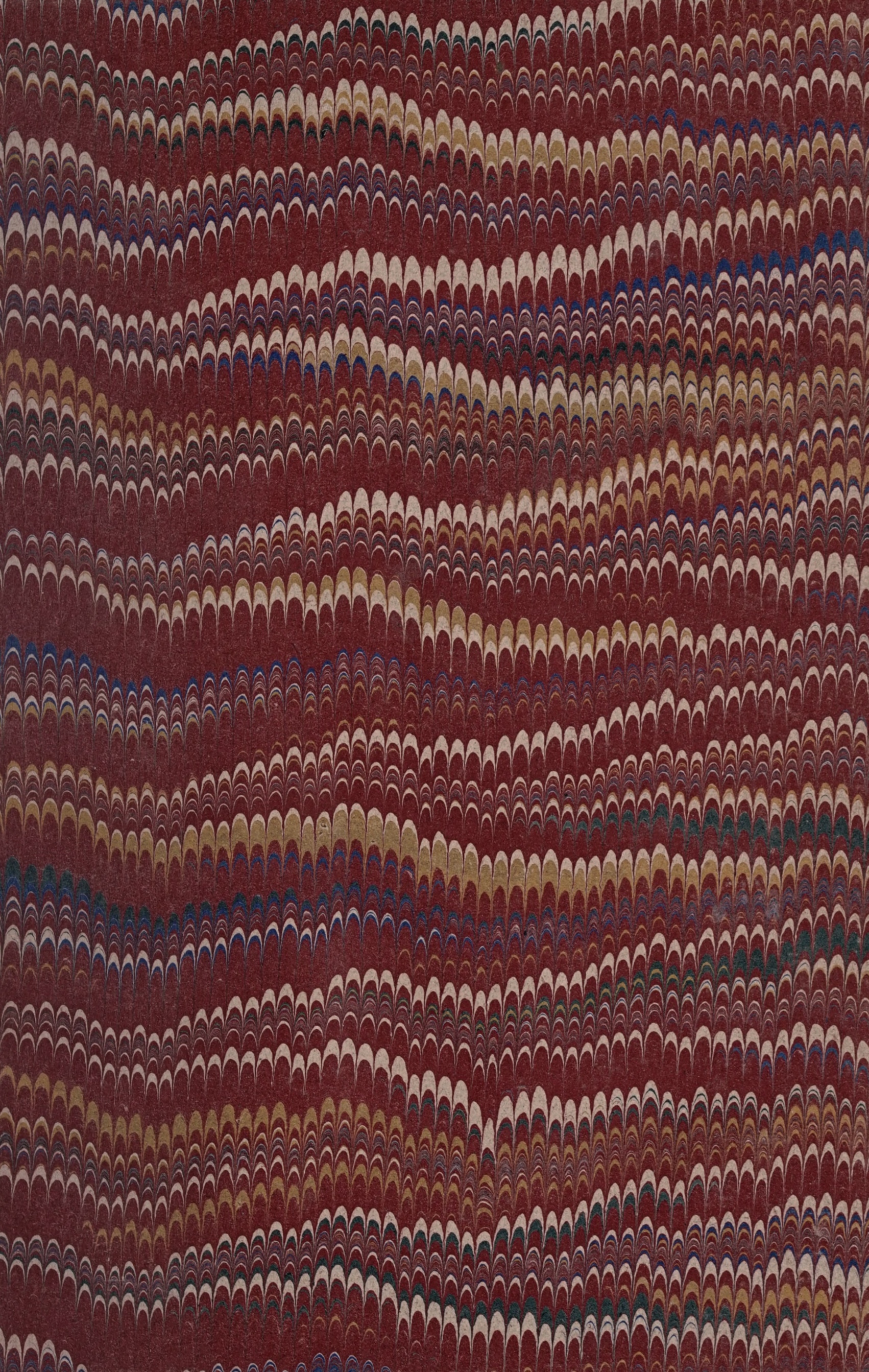
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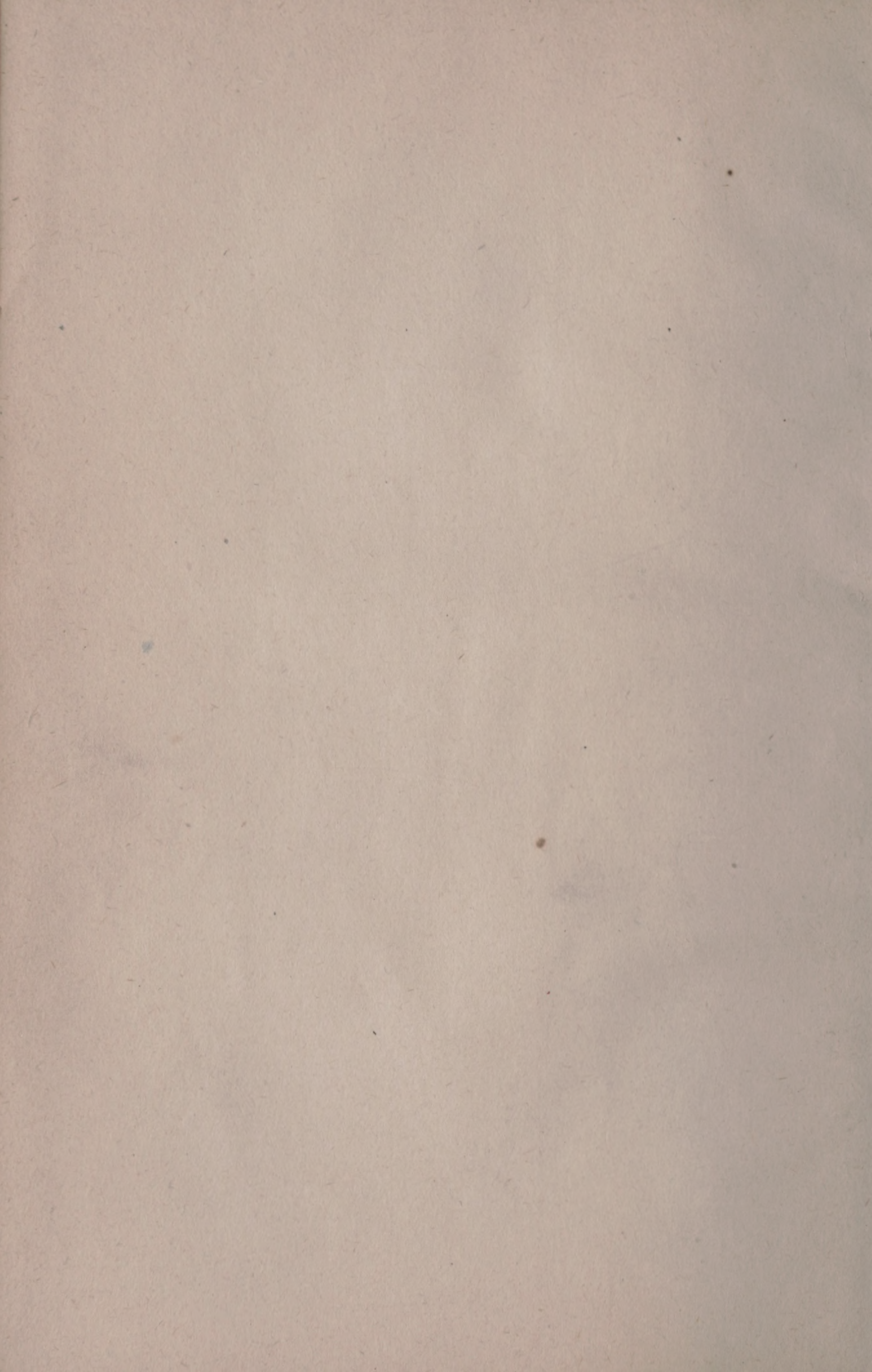
















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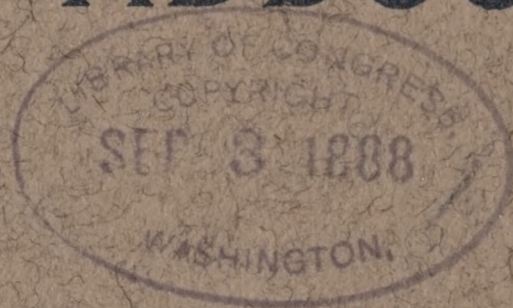
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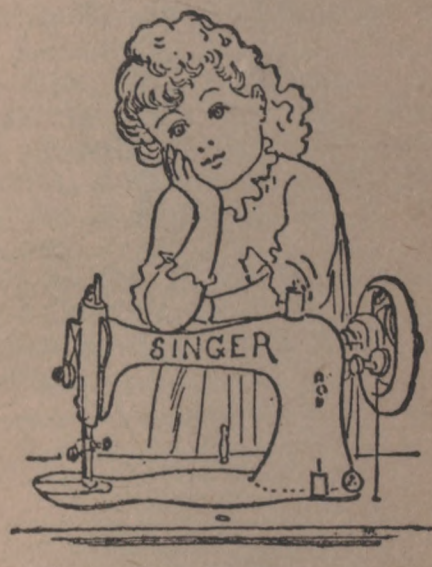
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# THE PRIDE OF THE PADDOCK:

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## CHAPTER I.

"THE SQUIRE'S BARGAIN."

It is a dull, leaden November day, and leaning over the gates of a grass paddock leading into a narrow miry lane, stands a ruddy, fresh-complexioned man of middle age, who by his attire might be put down as a small farmer. He is gazing listlessly at the vagaries of two ragged unkempt mares that are running in the field. The one was a black, the other a bright bay. The black was cast in more massive mould than her companion, whom it was quite evident just now that she was bullying. She was evidently master of the more slender limbed bay, and at this moment it was her spiteful caprice to prevent the latter from entering the hovel that stood in one corner of the field. A judge of horse-flesh, in spite of their roughness, would at once have recognised them as a couple of good-looking mares, but with this distinction, that whereas the bay was in all likelihood thorough-bred, the other had no pretensions to such purity of blood.



"I was a fool to buy you," murmured John Cornflower to himself, "I bought you to run with the other, and a precious life she seems like to lead you. Yes, it was clean stupid of me. I was tempted because I thought you were going cheap, and then you're a rare bred one you are, I ought to turn money over you in the spring, but then you want doing well, and hay is terrible dear this winter."

The steady tramp of a horse's foot made John Cornflower turn round to see who was coming down the lane. A stalwart, good-looking man, in a well-stained pink, and bestriding a powerful hunter, was advancing towards him at an easy trot. As he reached the gate, he pulled up his horse and exclaimed, "Holloa, John! What are you looking at? What have you got there? Somebody told me that you were so cock-a-hoop about the price you got for your four year-old last spring, that you were going in regularly for horse-breeding."

"There's allays lots of foolish talk around, Squire, that tale got about just because I bought that bay mare there. She was going cheap, and I liked the blood, but she won't run with the other, and I'm bound to be out of her in the spring."

"She looks a pretty well bred one," remarked Ralph Bridgeman.

"Well bred," exclaimed Mr. Cornflower, "she is as clean bred as anything on the turf. That's Golden Dream, by Goldseeker out of Dreamland."

"Ah! I recollect her," said the Squire, "a rare strain of blood, though she never did much during her racing career."

"No," said John Cornflower meditatively, "and



yet she comes of a running family. I bought her because she was going for thirty sovereigns."

"And a rare good deal you made of it," replied the Squire. "I'll give you a tenner for your bargain."

"Done with you, Squire," replied John Cornflower. "I'm so put to it for brass, that I don't know how I'll feed the things through the winter. I must tell you one thing about yon mare, if so be you don't know it, and that is, though she has been two years at the stud, she has not had a foal as yet."

"Ah!" said Ralph Bridgeman, "that accounts for your picking her up so cheap. Never mind John, I'll stand to my bargain and chance it. Send her out to the Court as soon as is convenient, and you shall have your cheque," and then with a cheery "good night," the Squire trotted on.

Ralph Bridgeman, of Gore Court, near Warminster, was a fair specimen of a thorough country gentleman. A good sportsman all round, but one who troubled London for very few weeks in the season. He was a man who personally supervised his own estate, and between that and hunting, fishing and shooting, found no lack of occupation. He had succeeded to his inheritance early in life, and had also taken unto himself a wife betimes. Two children had been born to him, a son and a daughter, of whom Reginald, the elder, was enrolled among the ranks of the briefless barristers, while Beatrice Bridgeman was the acknowledged belle of all that division of Clayfordshire. Gore Court was about five miles from Warminster, a cathedral city, with the additional advantage of having a regiment of soldiers always quartered in its midst.



There was a great deal of pleasant society in the sleepy old place in consequence. What with the young clergymen, always mysteriously attached to a cathedral city, and the officers, Warminster could muster a very decent crop of young men for dance, lawn tennis or other festival, a desideratum in these days of scarcity of that article, which Warminster knew how to appreciate. Gore Court was a house at which the soldiers were always welcome. Ralph Bridgeman, for a brief space, had been in the army in his earlier days, and had all that feeling of *camaraderie* for his old profession which I verily believe never leaves those who have once worn the sword. As he rode home, the Squire remembered that one or two of the soldiers from Warminster were coming over to dine and sleep at the Court. He looked at his watch as he rode into the stable-yard, and having handed his horse over to a groom, made the best of his way into the house.

"How late you are, Papa," exclaimed Beatrice Bridgeman, as he crossed the hall, "and yet you're the first home, neither Major Seaton, nor Mr. Beringer have as yet turned up; tiresome of you all, as we wanted to arrange about the charades before dinner."

"I am sorry for you, Trixie; but we met a long way off, and had a long, slow, dragging run, right away from home. I gave it up about three, but I didn't come straight back. I went round by Ephraim Mott's, to look at some buildings he is growling about, and then I pulled up at John Coruflower's and picked up a bargain."

"You shall tell me all about that to-morrow," re-



plied the young lady, "but it's really time you ran away to dress."

"I know," replied her father. "I hope to goodness those fellows have not to go back to Warminster for a like purpose."

"Oh no, Papa, I saw Major Seaton's dog cart arrive with their portmanteaux long ago. We must discuss the charades after dinner instead of before, that's all," and so saying, Beatrice tripped upstairs with a view to putting the finishing touches to her own toilette.

The dinner party at Gore Court that day, though small, was excessively gay. Besides the house party which consisted of the Squire, his wife, his daughter, and though last by no means the least of the family Aunt Barbara, or Miss Kurzon, to give her her proper designation, must be added Major Seaton and Mr. Beringer of Her Majesty's —th of the Line, Miss Chamberlayne, a particular friend of Beatrice's, and Mr. Muddleton, a neighbouring landowner and very old friend of the family. We always incline towards our antithesis, and though they were generally wrangling, there was a very kindly feeling between the latter and Aunt Barbara. Gossip went further, and declared that even now Miss Kurzon would take the man if he could only make up his mind to ask her. But indecision was the bane of Mr. Muddleton's character. It was always a matter of much difficulty to him to make up his mind about anything, and he had also an irritating habit of seeing matters from a point of view it had never occurred to anybody else to regard them. He offered a great contrast to the resolute, energetic temper of Miss Kurzon. The Squire always laughingly said



they were made for each other. Each possessed in character what the other wanted. Whereas Muddleton would take about two years to consider whether another cottage or two was wanted on his estate, Aunt Barbara would have built them first, and begun to wonder whether they were wanted afterwards. That there should be a tendency to talk hunting was only natural. When did hunting men ever congregate in the season, and not hymn the glories of Diana? Besides, both the young ladies, and all the men loved the sport, though Muddleton, from his natural vacillation of character, seldom held a forward place in a run.

"No, Major Seaton, we won't have any more hunting. I hate to hear it talked about when I have not been out, don't you, Jessie?"

"Yes," rejoined Miss Chamberlayne. "If they have had a good thing it is so provoking we were not in it, and if they've had a bad day it's most uninteresting to hear about."

"Now, Major Seaton," exclaimed Beatrice, "you know you promised to manage these charades, on the twenty-eighth; we don't want much rehearsal, I suppose."

"Entertainments that are not rehearsed don't generally entertain," replied the Major, sententiously, "but of course you don't want the elaborate rehearsal that you should have, but seldom get, for private theatricals. If we could manage three good steady rehearsals, they ought to go well enough. What do you say, Beringer? You've undertaken to do stage manager."

"That ought to be quite sufficient," replied the gentleman addressed, "but have you thought of the



words? Remember, Miss Bridgeman, our bargain was that you were to find two words, and we were to find one."

"Well, I don't know," replied Beatrice. "I don't think I've quite hit off mine, have you, Jessie?"

"Yes, I'm quite ready," replied Miss Chamberlayne, "what do you think of ——?"

"Stop, stop" cried Major Seaton, "you must not proclaim the word on the housetop before we have acted it."

"Now," said Muddleton "I should have thought that a very good plan, because then, you see, if from the fault of the actors, or their own stupidity, the audience didn't guess it, it wouldn't signify."

"Don't you see, Mr. Muddleton," exclaimed Aunt Barbara, "that the trying to make out a puzzle is amusing. We don't care much about the riddle when we've guessed it, nor are we obliged to anyone for telling it to us."

"Never was any good at charades myself," said the Squire, "never knew what to say when it came to my turn to speak."

"That's the great beauty of pantomimic charades," said Beringer, "nobody speaks."

"Nobody speaks?" exclaimed Aunt Barbara.

"No, Miss Kurzon," said Beringer, "I mustn't explain to you now, but they will explain for themselves when you see them."

And now Mrs. Bridgeman bent her head, and the ladies took their departure for the drawing-room. That with four hunting men, three of whom had been out, the conversation should speedily revert to that topic, it is needless to say.



"What became of you, Ralph, after Childerley Gorse?" asked Major Seaton.

These twain had served together during the Squire's brief military career.

"Well, I hate a slow muddling run like that, there's no fun to be got out of a cold scent and a faint-hearted fox. I cut it, rode round by Torby. However, take it all round, I don't think I've had such a bad day. I did a bit of horse-dealing."

"The deuce you did," exclaimed Seaton, "whose horse did you buy?"

"Well, you know, I've a small stud of thoroughbred mares, and go in for breeding a little. I picked a rare bred 'un up to-day. Golden Dream, by Goldseeker out of Dreamland."

"She is a rare bred one," said young Beringer, "but she was a very poor performer on the race-course, Squire."

"Yes, but it's an odd thing, the progeny of many of these mares, that can't race themselves, turn out right well. And now, if no one will have any more wine, we'll go into the other room."

As they entered the drawing-room, the Squire was confronted by his daughter, who at once exclaimed:

"You never told me about your bargain Papa, what is it?"

"I picked up a horse cheap, that's all."

"Anything I can ride?"

"Not exactly my dear, she's a brood mare."

"Well, I hope you'll have luck with her," said Beatrice, "but I feel a little disappointed about your bargain."

When they got to the smoking-room, the Squire,



who was very full of his bargain, enlarged considerably upon the wonderful strain of blood he had got hold of.

"It's all very true, Mr. Bridgeman," said young Beringer, who came of racing stock himself, and had been about racing paddocks from boyhood. "Golden Dream inherits all you say, rare stoutness on the side of her sire, and a great strain of speed from her mother, and though she showed neither of them herself, it's quite possible her offspring may. The drawback about your bargain is this. Though two years at the stud she has never had a foal yet, and it's very possible she never may have. A barren brood mare is a very useless piece of furniture."

"You're right, you're right," said the Squire, "it's a regular plunge in the lucky bag. I only gave forty sovereigns for her, and if she does have a foal I shall get that for it as a yearling and more to boot. Now you're settled down how does Warminster suit you, Seaton."

"Down to the ground," rejoined the Major. "We've more hunting than we've horses for. People are awfully kind about asking us to shoot, etc., when a man has been knocking about for a quarter of a century, as I have done, he learns how to appreciate quiet country quarters; however my baccy is done and I reckon it's about time to turn in," and so saying the major rose and took up his bedroom candle.

The move became general, and in another half-hour the denizens of Gore Court were wrapped in slumber.



## CHAPTER II.

### PANTOMIMIC CHARADES.

THERE is sign of wild revel at Core Court, a general confusion pervades the establishment; the drawing-room is clear of furniture, a miniature stage has been erected at one end and the body of the room is packed with chairs and benches. Aunt Barbara says that the house is turned out of windows, and the Squire jovially remarks that, "we look deuced like having a kick-up." There are to be charades followed by a dance, and all the neighbours round had been bid to come and see the first, and join in the second.

"Dinner, you theatrical people," exclaimed Ralph Bridgeman as he put his head in at the drawing-room door, and glanced at the group who were standing on the little stage at the end of the room. It was very slightly raised, and the scenery was of the simplest description, being composed of large screens roughly painted to represent what was wanted. On the right of what might be termed the proscenium was a piano, and this latter is a most important factor in the representation of pantomimic charades, which depend as much upon the accompanist as upon the actors. These, it must be borne in mind, were no scratch impromptu charades, but had been duly rehearsed, and appropriate music selected to go with them. Both Major Seaton and



Beringer had been indefatigable in coaching them, and now felt confident of success.

"All right, Papa," exclaimed Beatrice. "We have quite finished, they all go now without a hitch, and they are such an improvement on the old talking charades," and as she spoke she led the way towards the library, where it had been arranged that the actors should snatch an early repast.

"Well, Beringer," said the Squire, "do you feel as confident of the success of your show as Beatrice?"

"Quite," was the rejoinder, "we are all very perfect; it isn't often one has the luck to catch such an accompanist as Miss Chamberlayne, one can't go wrong while she is playing."

"No," said Seaton, with a jolly laugh, "and I flatter myself that our sensation scene in the last charade will fetch the house down."

"Well, take care of yourselves at this impromptu repast. I must run away and dress. We shall have the Moseleys here directly. Those uncomfortable people always think eight means half-past seven."

A little before the time advertised people began to arrive rapidly, things were always well done at Gore Court.

People don't think much of distance in the country, and charades, a dance, and, as Mr. Moseley put it, a supper and wine that you can rely upon, make a very pleasant programme for a dull November evening. The performance was a great success, the pantomimic representation was new to many of the guests, another thing the affair was kept within due bounds and was not too long. It



would be tedious to follow the entertainment all through, so we will confine ourselves to the last or what Major Seaton termed the sensational charade.

The curtain rose upon a kitchen scene with a practical window in the centre at back. Miss Bridgeman, most coquettishly attired as a cook, with her sleeves rolled up, and the nattiest of white aprons, was bustling about among her plates and dishes. The piano in the meantime kept playing a dreamy valse.

Suddenly the window at the back is thrown up, and Major Seaton, attired as a policeman, appears at the window, and enquires, in pantomimic show, whether it is safe for him to enter. The cook runs to the wing and peeps off, then nods and beckons him, whereupon the policeman deliberately gets through the window and embraces the cook; as he does so Miss Chamberlayne breaks off her valse and strikes into nigger melodies, changing from one to another with great rapidity: during this the policeman goes through conventional pantomimic business showing that he is hungry. The cook pushes him into a chair by the table, spreads a cloth rapidly, and puts on it bread, cheese and a pitcher of ale. The piano, which had wandered from one Christy Minstrel tune to another, now suddenly seems to have settled down to the old nigger tune of

"There's somebody in the house with Dinah,  
There's somebody in the house I know."

Just as the policeman takes up his knife and prepares for assault upon the cheese, Beringer, dressed as a butcher boy, appears at the open window; he shakes his fist at the policeman, and pantomimically



expresses the most violent indignation at Major Seaton's presence; during all this time the piano continues to play

"There's somebody in the house with Dinah."

Beringer slaps his forehead, at last nods, rubs his hands together, as though to say, "I have it," once more shakes his fist furiously at the policeman and then disappears. As he does so the piano immediately changes back to the old dreamy valse with which it began. The policeman is about to cut the cheese, when he suddenly bends forward and is observed to stare intently into it. First dismay, and secondly horror, as near as Major Seaton can render it, are depicted in his countenance. He raises himself from the chair, and with both hands upon the table, bends over and glares upon the cheese. His face is convulsed with rage. He snaps his fingers at the cook, he stamps, he gesticulates! it is evident he is reviling her severely. The cook buries her face in her apron and sobs audibly, the policeman still stamps. Suddenly the cook drops her apron, snaps her fingers at her passionate adorer, points to the window, puts her arms akimbo, and is evidently giving as good as she has got. The policeman turns sulkily away, sinks into the chair, turning his back to both table and window, in short is looking off the stage, right. The cook sinks into her chair on the other side the table, turning her back upon it and the policeman, and throwing her apron over her head, begins to rock herself, pantomimic way of expressing emotion.

The piano, which at the policeman's rising had



changed from the dreamy valse tune into a hurry, and gradually increasing in sound, now gently glides back into the old tune. Suddenly at the window appears the butcher boy; he carries a small box. After surveying the pair for a few seconds he shakes his fist once more at the policeman, then getting stealthily in at the window, creeps slowly forward and places the box beneath the policeman's chair. Then rapidly retreating makes one more gesture of anger and rapidly disappears through the window. The piano immediately changes from the dreamy valse to a hurry, increasing in sound with great rapidity, there is a slight explosion, the policeman tumbles off his chair, the cook screams, and a tremendous crash of the piano brings down the curtain.

"Well, Major, our cracker was a great success," said Beringer.

"Yes, went capitally, but you were quite right, it would have been more effective if it had been a little bigger, but I was afraid of frightening the people in front."

"Yes, Mr. Beringer, and you ought also to consider the nerves of the ladies on the stage, you couldn't expect Jessie and me to stand a regular bombardment."

"You played admirably, Miss Bridgeman," returned the accused; "and I am quite sure a little more powder wouldn't have frightened you."

"It's no use," returned Beatrice laughingly, "we can be egged on at times to do deeds of great daring, but you'll never coax me into winning the Victoria Cross, and now I must run away and change my dress. I can't stand being a cook all the evening,



although, Major Seaton, I shall only be too pleased to reserve a dance for the policeman."

Of course amongst the audience are the usual comments, and as is customary, an elucidation of the riddle set before them is arrived at. If a word be well chosen, and well interpreted, it should be no mystery to the spectators: still, there are always some that fail to understand the puzzle propounded. It was as little likely Mr. Muddleton would unravel the skein as that Aunt Barbara would miss doing so.

"I don't quite see it," he observed. "It can't be explosion, and I don't see how they can make out bombardment."

"You're too bad, Mr. Muddletop," exclaimed Aunt Barbara. "They played it so well, and you won't see it."

"Ah! you're in their confidence."

"Indeed I am not," replied Miss Bridgeman. "Why Dinah of course was the name of the cook, the music told you that. She asks the policeman to supper, who discovers mites in the cheese, and then his rival, the butcher boy, blows him up, in the last popular fashion, with *dynamite*."

"Well, I should never have thought of that," rejoined Mr. Muddletop, "but I suppose that is the word."

"Well done, Miss Chamberlayne," cried the squire, as that young lady, who had no necessity for changing her dress, made her appearance. "I understand what Major Seaton meant now. Your playing had a great deal to do with our successfully understanding the word, and now we'll come and get some supper while they clear away the chairs."



They were a very merry party. There were the charades to talk over, and there was dancing to follow, and in due course, the music from the drawing-room proclaimed that all was ready.

Harry Beringer had, long ago, made the discovery that not only was Beatrice Bridgeman the best valser round all Warminster but one of the nicest girls he had ever met, to boot. Still, he would have been very much puzzled had anyone asked him if he had serious intention with regard to this girl. In good truth he had never even thought about it; he was as careless, reckless a young gentleman as ever carried her Majesty's commission; he was amazingly popular, both with men and women; and, what was more, enjoyed the reputation of being "pretty good all round." But as for matrimony, that was a thing that Harry Beringer, in his twenty-sixth year, had only turned over in a cursory fashion. That he must marry at some time, he regarded as certain; he could see no other prospect of appeasing his creditors. And, as Mr. Beringer was given to hunting, which he could hardly afford, and one or two other equally expensive tastes, it may easily be guessed that he was tolerably deep in debt. It is curious that this theory is very popular with young men. They are wont to regard matrimony as a commercial transaction, with which inclination has nothing to do, but for the sake of human nature it is gratifying to think that, as a rule, they rarely act up to their professions.

But the strains of the "Mia Cara" valse are ringing through the room, and Harry Beringer whirling by, with Beatrice Bridgeman on his arm,



thinks little of that day of reckoning which attends upon those who live not wisely but too well. He was thoroughly alive to his partner's charms; but, at the present moment, in high spirits at the success of the charades, he gives himself up to the intoxication of the dance.

"I suppose we are likely to have you for some time at Warminster?" said Beatrice, as they paused for a few moments in the dance.

"Well, not for very long. In these days it is rare to get a long spell of one station; however, we ought to be here till next autumn."

"That is the worst of knowing the officers quartered here. By the time we have made great friends amongst them they leave for distant parts, and we see no more of them."

"All the more reason, Miss Beatrice, that you should be kind to us. We are having a good time here, but Heaven knows what's in store for us. We may be sent to some quarter where there is not a pretty woman within miles of us; where there is no dancing; where the hunting is execrable, and where all the comfort of civilized life is denied us."

"A very moving picture, Mr. Beringer," replied Beatrice, laughing; "but you don't imagine you are going to impose upon me in that fashion. I know you've dull quarters at times, but I think you contrive to get as much fun out of life as any class of men I know."

"Ah! you don't know what haunts the mind of the soldier of the present day. There's always Ireland looming before him, where the landlords are all broke, and the peasantry throw stones at him because he is called upon to interfere with their



talking sedition, and indulging in their favorite sport of agrarian outrage."

"Well, Mr. Beringer, I can only hope when we lose you that you will be sent to a quarter more congenial to your taste."

"What a pretty girl!" was Harry Beringer's somewhat irrelevant reply. "Who is she?" and he indicated a slight, quietly dressed, dark-eyed girl, who, just at that moment, passed them.

"That—oh, that is Rose Rawlinson; she's the daughter of one of our leading tenants. She is a very nice girl, too; but her father has made the mistake of educating her above her station, and her natural associates are rather rough for her refined taste."

"I suppose you have plenty of the tenants here to-night?" said Beringer.

"Oh, yes; it is an annual entertainment, they all come to see the acting, and the larger ones are asked to join the ball and supper afterwards, while the smaller tenants are regaled with supper in the servants' hall."

"Let's have another turn," said Beringer—"it's a sin to waste any more of this lovely valse."

When their dance terminated Miss Bridgeman was claimed by Major Seaton. A little while afterwards, she saw—somewhat to her surprise—that Mr. Beringer was dancing with Rose Rawlinson; and, what was more, evidently intent on making himself excessively agreeable.



### CHAPTER III.

#### "ROSE RAWLINSON."

"A MOST successful evening, Jessie," said Miss Bridgeman, as the two girls sat over the fire in the latter's room, talking the whole affair over. "The charades owed half their success to your playing. The splendid crash with which you brought down the curtain I'm sure ought to have suggested dynamite to the whole company. Your explosion on the piano quite eclipsed Mr. Beringer's stage effect."

"That very volatile soldier fully recompensed himself for his arduous duties. He did his duty fairly by you and me, in the matter of dancing; but he deserves punishment for his outrageous flirtation with Rose Rawlinson.

"Yes," replied Beatrice laughing, "I was conscious of shameless desertion, and as for Rose, the little minx, I can only say she looked as if she was thoroughly enjoying her ball. Well it really is quite time we went to bed; run away, and to-morrow after breakfast, we'll walk down to the paddocks, and see papa's new bargain. I always like a walk before lunch, more especially when one has been up late."

Left to herself, Miss Bridgeman mused a little on Mr. Beringer's want of allegiance. It really was too bad of him; already Rose showed signs of



discontent with her forbearings and surroundings, attention from a man like Mr. Beringer would only turn her head, and still further increase that; even if there were the slightest chance of anything serious coming of it, she should feel it her duty to oppose it. Mr. Beringer's people were of good family, and would be sure to be bitterly opposed to any idea of such a marriage as that, and then Beatrice could not help smiling at herself in the glass, as she thought how very far her speculations had carried her.

As regards a slight ball-room flirtation, Miss Bridgeman was quite aware that there are men who cannot help making love to every pretty woman they come across. They mean it thoroughly at the time, it is merely they are too catholic in their admiration. As one of these offenders once explained on finding himself in some scrape from this fatal facility, "it is only my unfortunate manner." Then Miss Bridgeman drew herself up, and determined that as the Squire's daughter it was her duty to watch over the daughters of his tenantry, and that Mr. Beringer must be spoken to; and then as she glanced once more at her counterfeit and saw the sunny golden-red tresses and deep blue eyes, she turned away with a triumphant laugh and retired to bed in the serenely pleasant frame of mind of one who has determined to do her duty.

She slept the sleep of the just, and though after the evening's revel the breakfast at Gore Court equalled in its unpunctuality the starting of a selling race at a genuine old-fashioned country meeting, yet Beatrice Bridgeman, was the last to put in an appearance, and came in for much mock condolence



upon her over-fatigue and the general prostration produced by her histrionic exertions of the night before. Looking fresh as a rose she laughingly parried the attacks upon her, and, her hunger appeased, said :

"Now, who is for a stroll this morning. Jessie and I are going down to the paddocks to inspect papa's new bargain."

"I shall be delighted, for one," exclaimed Harry Beringer. "From what the Squire said yesterday it will be the visit of one invalid to another."

"Take care, take care," retorted Miss Bridgeman. "I have a crow to pick with you presently, but what did papa say about his new purchase?"

"Only that she had been half starved before he got her, and bullied besides by some other horse, she had been running with, and wanted both oats and taking care of. I suppose you take a great interest in your father's paddocks, Miss Bridgeman."

"Yes, but it isn't half such fun as it was when he first began, and bred horses chiefly for his own use ; then we saw them grow up and rode or drove them afterwards. Now, he goes in for racehorses, and they are sold as yearlings."

"The Squire has not been lucky in his sales so far, I fancy ; but it requires time to get a lot of good mares together."

"That's what papa says. It's his great hobby and like most hobbies doesn't pay. However farming's worse nowadays, and that's what most of our neighbours indulge in ; Mr. Muddleton for instance."

"I'd a good deal rather raise thoroughbred stock



than farm," remarked Beringer, somewhat disdainfully. "Besides it is a very lucrative business when your stud has once made a name."

"Well come and see ours which hasn't as yet," rejoined Miss Bridgeman laughing. "Now, Jessie are you ready?"

"Am I ready," retorted Miss Chamberlayne. "Why I finished breakfast an hour ago."

The party were soon under way, and a pleasant stroll across the park brought them to the eight paddocks in which the Squire's mares and their progeny were running. The foals, some half-score in all, were first inspected, and the cream of the lot duly admired, and then the matrons of the stud were visited. These were mostly running together in the Eight acre.

"Now, Bristow," said Miss Bridgeman, "we want to see the new purchase. I don't even know her name, but the last animal."

"We only got her two days ago, miss, and she's not here, she is in one of the small paddocks. The fact is, she is downright cowed. Cornflower told me, she was a bag of bones when he got her, and he put her in a field with a half-bred thing who got master of her. I daren't put her amongst the others till I have put some heart in her."

"Ah! I understand," interposed Miss Bridgeman, "she is what ladies call in a low nervous state, poor thing."

"Capitally put," said Major Seaton. "You are quite right, Bristow, she will pick up much quicker if left to herself. These high-bred matrons can be as nasty to each other at times as the best bred ladies."



"Yes," chimed in Jessie Chamberlayne, "I can quite believe that, and then think after a long course of snubbing and bullying how nice it must be to be left to yourself for a time; but let us go and see this fair recluse."

"Where is she, Bristow?" enquired Beatrice.

"I've got her in the next paddock, miss," replied Bristow, as he proceeded to lead the way thither.

They followed Bristow into the next paddock, and the party was soon standing before a ragged, lean looking bay mare, with drooping crest and melancholy eyes.

"Well!" exclaimed Beatrice. "I don't think much of papa's bargain. She looks to me as if she would die."

"I'm sure she requires port wine and bark," remarked Jessie Chamberlayne, whose merely theoretical knowledge of horse-flesh was slight.

"That about expresses it," said Beringer. "She has been a good deal neglected, but Bristow will have her all round again in a few weeks, take my word for it. But you're wrong, Miss Bridgeman, she's not such a bad shaped mare, when you come to look her over."

"No, sir," chimed in Bristow, "and she's a rare bred 'un, and a very prettily named one. Golden Dream, by Goldseeker, out of Dreamland."

"Golden Dream, yes, it is a pretty name," said Beatrice, meditatively.

"Ah! and what golden dreams we all indulge in in connection with horse-flesh," said Beringer.

"Yes," replied Beatrice, "especially you gentlemen, when you go racing. Well now I think we've



seen all that Bristow has to show us, and we had better stroll home to lunch."

As the quartet strolled across the park, they broke into couples, and Beatrice, who had Mr. Beringer for her cavalier, felt that now was the time to deliver herself of that little sermon she meditated, but somehow it did not seem quite so easy to liberate her mind of it this morning as it had done last night. She was forced to admit to herself that the duty point of view had rather vanished, and that a spirit of raillery seemed a fitter mode in which to approach the subject. However, she was looking her best, and she knew it. Her close-fitting cloth dress showed her trim figure to perfection, the fresh air had brought the bloom to her cheek, and the light to her eyes, and nothing gives a woman more confidence than feeling that her appearance is beyond criticism.

"Well, Mr. Beringer, if anybody enjoyed the dance last night, I should say you did. A more shameless flirtation than you thought proper to indulge in with Rose Rawlinson I never witnessed."

"I don't see anything shameful about it," retorted Beringer. "She is a very pretty girl, and danced very nicely. If we were mutually pleased with each other I don't see what harm there was in it."

"Oh, it was easy to see you were mutually pleased with each other. I've no doubt you have turned that girl's head."

"I don't know why you should think so," rejoined Beringer, smiling. "Lots of the other men danced with the farmers' daughters, and if it was my luck to secure the prettiest who can blame me?"



"Yes, but they didn't dance persistently with them all night."

"Not quite so fortunate as myself in their partners perhaps," retorted the imperturbable linesman.

"You're laughing at me, Mr. Beringer," retorted Beatrice with a slight dash of asperity in her tone. "I think it was very bad form of you to pay that girl such marked attention."

"I think you are making a mountain of a molehill," replied Beringer, laughing. "It is one of the canons of military law to make oneself agreeable to a pretty woman. If Miss Rawlinson troubles her head about me, further than that I was a pleasant partner at a very pleasant dance, I shall be much astonished. I am quite as conceited as my fellows no doubt, but it don't carry me that far," he concluded mendaciously.

"It isn't that," replied Beatrice, "you're putting ideas into Rose's head which will only make her discontented with her station, and she is quite enough inclined to be that already," and with this parting salvo Miss Bridgeman abruptly dropped the subject with the feeling that she had had considerably the worst of the argument.

Mr. Beringer, though a young man, was somewhat skilled in the ways of women, and was not a little surprised to find that his flirtation with Rose Rawlinson had piqued Beatrice. He was by no means weak enough to think that Miss Bridgeman had a *tendresse* for him, but it was something even to find that she took an interest in his proceedings. He was very anxious to produce a favourable impression upon her, more he hardly looked forward



to, as before said he had no immediate thoughts of marriage, and in the second place, even if he could win the girl herself, he thought it very improbable that Ralph Bridgeman would ever consent to give him his daughter. Beatrice would bring a fortune in a small way to the man who married her, while he, Harry Beringer, had nothing but a very moderate allowance from his father in addition to his pay. His dancing so much with Rose had been due to the course of events, he would gladly have monopolised Miss Bridgeman had that been possible, but in her father's house it was not likely that Beatrice would have many dances to spare, indeed, her card was, as a rule, speedily filled at any ball-room in her own county. Under those circumstances, Mr. Beringer, after his wont, consoled himself with the next prettiest girl available, and so well did Rose dance, and so well did he get on with her, that he undoubtedly did not press Miss Bridgeman for one or two more dances as he might have done.

Mr. Beringer, one need scarcely say, was far too experienced a young gentleman not to have paved the way for seeing his new enchantress again. It was very easy; he had promised to lend her a book that she wished to read, and which he vowed he possessed, but which in reality if not to be had in Warminster he would have to procure from London. He had further professed great love for music, and admitted that he played a little himself. This was true, he did, just sufficient to accompany himself in a hunting song. And then he mendaciously declared that he possessed a copy of a set of vales that were played that evening which she pronounced delicious, and said that he should be only too happy



to lend it to her. Further, Miss Rawlinson told him that she was very fond of hunting, and that the reason he had not as yet seen her out was that she had been on a visit to some friends in London and had only returned a few days before. So that upon the whole there was no reason Mr. Beringer should not see a good deal of Rose Rawlinson if he chose, and he was quite clear in his own mind that he did choose, although he did not think it worth while to confide his intentions on this point to Miss Bridgeman.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### “HARRINGTON BROOK.”

JOHN RAWLINSON lived in a substantial thatch-covered farmhouse, about a mile from Gore Court. He was a prosperous well-to-do man, farming some five hundred acres at an easy rent under Ralph Bridgeman. The Squire's farms were mostly a good size, though this was perhaps one of the biggest. The house was well though solidly furnished, and the large old-fashioned garden was as trimly kept as that of Gore Court. Farming, until of late, had been a profitable business, and the Squire's tenants had thriven for some years on it—a jolly, boisterous, free-handed set, on excellent terms with their landlord, and eating and drinking of the best. Ralph Bridgeman was always liberal in the matter of game, hares and pheasants were liberally distributed amongst them, and for the matter of that, there were always plenty more to be bought, and



venison to boot, in Warminster market. They knew what good living was, these Clayfordshire farmers, and if the ordinary on market day did not present salmon at half-a-crown a pound the landlord knew very well that he would lose his customers. They made up for it loyally afterwards by drinking much powerful port and portentous rummers of mahogany-colored brandy and water. They were a bustling, burly, hard-working race, interchanging a good deal of rough hospitality with one another, and if their draughts on market days seemed to the uninitiated "Deep as the rolling Zuyder Zee," they took little harm by them. But there was an end coming to all this, already the first signs of the decay of the agricultural interest might be noted by those shrewd enough, and already John Rawlinson scented trouble from afar.

"Dash it all, Mary," he said, as they sat at their early dinner, "I don't know how we shall carry on if things don't mend. We've laughed for three years at bad crops and bad prices and said What did it matter? The good times would soon come round again, and that our backs were broad enough to bear it, but here is a fourth year come, and not only are my crops worse than ever, but the little corn I have is worth nothing when it's taken to market."

"It's getting serious I know John," replied his wife. "It's well we've got Rose's schooling all paid for."

"Yes father," replied the girl, "that's one expense saved. I shall cost you no more on that score."

"It seems as if no farm produce would fetch anything," said Mrs. Rawlinson. "I see by the papers that they're going to send us mutton from



Australia and undersell us in our own market, just as the Americans do with the wheat."

"I don't know how it will all end," said John Rawlinson. "We are not over rented, and the Squire is a good landlord, but at the meeting the other day, we all agreed that we must ask the Squire for an abatement of rent till better times come round. It goes agin' the grain, but there's no help for it. It's no use waiting until our capital is all gone, and the last three years has swallowed up a plaguey lot of mine."

"Chickens fetch good prices," observed Mrs. Rawlinson, "but we can't live upon the profits of the poultry yard."

"Well, old lady, Heaven knows how it's all to end, but I must be off now to look after those chaps in the top close. The labourers don't put their heart into their work as they used before we dropped their wages."

"And I," said Mrs. Rawlinson, "must go and look after those sluts in the dairy; they do nothing but gabble instead of churning, if I don't keep an eye on them! You are no good, Rose, or else you would be a help to me. I always said it was wrong, but your father would have his way. You are a good girl, but it is a pity you have been brought up a lady."

"But, mother," rejoined the girl, "I'm no fool, and quite willing to learn, if you will only teach me."

"Tut, tut, child, 'twould be more bother than 'tis worth, learning you now. Amuse yourself with your pianer and books; only, mind there's a real good cup of tea for your father when he comes in at six o'clock."



Left to herself, Rose begins to wonder whether her mother is not right. With naturally fine instincts she has been brought up a "lady," and now that troublous times are coming on them feels painfully conscious how very little help she can give in breasting the stream. Then there is some truth in what Miss Bridgeman alleged, she is a little discontented with her surroundings; her brothers are proud of her, but can hardly understand her, while their friends, heartily as she welcomes them, seem awestruck at her presence. She feels that she acts as a sort of wet blanket on their naturally boisterous good fellowship; to use a slang expression they are afraid to "let out" before her. That her father is speaking the truth, she knows well. Only the other night her elder brother John, holding one of the snuggest little farms on the Gore Court estate, had said that he didn't know how he was to carry on "The Shaws," any longer while Robert, who lived at home and assisted his father, re-echoed the same complaint. Well, she must do her best; if she couldn't one way, she must find another, though at present she did not exactly see what the other way was to be. "Play the piano," she mused, as she sat down to the instrument. "Yes I can do that, and sing too, both nicely enough, I have been told, to please people, but to make money—no! Folks expect to hear much better playing than mine when they pay for it.

Then she sat down to the instrument, and her fingers strayed idly over the keys, till her reflections were suddenly cut short by the tramp of a horse's hoofs on the gravel outside, there was a sharp ring at the bell, a slight mingling of voices, the hoofs trod



quietly away in the direction of the stables, the door opened, and the neat parlour-maid with a smile announced "Mr. Beringer, miss."

Rose started from her seat and, with a slight flush on her face, came forward to meet her partner of two nights before.

"How do you do, Miss Rawlinson," remarked that mendacious soldier as he shook hands. "I have somehow mislaid the book, but I have brought you the waltzes you so much admired the other evening. What a good dance it was! wasn't it? And now of course the most important thing is to know when we are to have another."

"Ah, when," replied Rose; "dances round Warminster are few and far betwee. But it *was* a good ball wasn't it. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I laughed at the charades, and oh, Mr. Beringer, you did make the most vindictive butcher boy ever seen."

"Indeed, it was all great fun. The Squire does things so well; Miss Bridgeman too, was capital wasn't she?"

"She does everything well," rejoined Rose warmly; "she dances beautifully, and of course you have seen her ride?"

"Yes, she can go, and what's more she rides like a lady, quietly and neatly, capital style, but as far as dancing goes, I'm sure, Miss Rawlinson, you need not fear comparison with anyone."

For a moment a shadow flitted across Rose's face, which puzzled Harry Beringer, but it cleared again as he asked the simple question.

"Don't you hunt?"

"Yes," was the gleeful rejoinder, "when I get the



chance, but I have only one horse, while Miss Bridgeman has a couple of her own and can always borrow a mount from her father."

"You'll be out of course on Friday."

"Yes. Tapperly is only a couple of miles from here, and The Shaws, the first cover they draw, is on my brother's farm, and " continued Rose proudly, "they seldom have to look farther for their fox."

"Well I shall hope to see you there," rejoined Beringer," and trust we may have as good a day as we had evening the other night at Gore Court."

"What fun it will be if we do," said Rose, her dark eyes sparkling at the bare thought. "It's a very pretty country and we usually do have a good run from Tapperly. Good-bye" she added, as her guest rose to go, "and thank you very much for the vales."

She stood at the window, watching him, as he rode away. "He says," she muttered, "Miss Bridgeman 'can go,' he shall see if I can't. If ever I rode I will on Friday."

A soft grey November morning and the horsemen cluster thick about Tapperly cross roads, nothing like such a crowd as is seen in the shires, for Clayfordshire is one of the so-called provincial counties, not but what they can ride pretty hard down there, and do, at times.

It was a favourite meet, being only some four or five miles from Warminster. All the hunting men from the barracks were, of course, there; and there was also a contingent from the cathedral, who drove out with their feminine belongings, just to see the hounds throw off. Ralph Bridgeman and his



daughter were there; and so was Rose Rawlinson, under the chaperonage of her father, who, however, did not affect to ride, but confined himself to the coffee house department. Mr. Muddleton, too, was there; and, to the amusement of the field, had just propounded a quite new theory as to the way in which the fox would break from The Shaws.

The Shaws were three small spinnies, varying from five to three acres apiece, and almost connected; and the line the fox would take was pretty well stereotyped on the minds of all the hunting men present.

To the Squire's remark of "Pooh, pooh, Muddleton, you know very well he always breaks from the far spinny—he can't do otherwise—and makes straight away for Kirby."

"Foxes, like Christians," responded Mr. Muddleton, "sometimes change their minds. And a muggy morning like this was calculated to make one take a different view of things. I know, if I were a fox, I should have great difficulty about making up my mind what it was best to do under such unpleasant circumstances."

A roar of laughter greeted Mr. Muddleton's allusion to his besetting infirmity; and the Squire exclaimed:—

"Ah! if you had been born a fox, Muddleton, you would have been chopped in cover! The hounds would have been down upon you before you had made up your mind about the best way out."

In the meantime, the two girls had greeted each other warmly. They were really great friends, as far as the difference in their station allowed. But there was no doubt, they were just a little bit



jealous of each other; not of each other's attractions, they were both above that—to say nothing of each having good reason to place thorough confidence in her own charms. If Miss Bridgeman had thought fit to lecture Mr. Beringer on his flirtation with Rose, it was from pique, the cause of which she had not as yet confessed to herself; but there was no doubt they were slightly jealous of each other in the hunting field. Of the sprinkling of ladies who hunted with the West Clayfordshire, they were, undeniably, the two best horsewomen. Each had her own section of admirers; and it was very hard to say which was the better of the two—sometimes one, sometimes the other, had the best of it. This feeling, indeed, had, upon one occasion, called forth a rebuke from the courteous but much-tried Master, who, when their jealous riding had caused them to press what he deemed unduly on his darlings, suddenly exclaimed, “Upon my soul, young ladies, I wish you would think a little less of each other and more of my hounds.”

However, the pack is thrown in, and the Squire has barely time to ejaculate, “No racing to-day, Trixie mine; and I trust, Miss Rose, your father has issued similar orders,” when the hounds break into a general chorus, there is a view halloo, from the far side of the cover, the hounds crash through it, and, to the confusion of everybody, Muddleton has turned out a true prophet, and the fox has broke according to his prediction.

“This way, Miss Bridgeman!” exclaims Harry Beringer, as he sets his horse going, and races round the cover, followed by the two girls and a score or so more of horsemen, all anxious to make up for a



bad start. "I'll give you a lead over this," he shouted.

"Lead those two!" exclaimed Major Seaton, "by Jove, my boy, you had better take care they don't lead you. They can both ride, and know every yard of the country."

Harry Beringer made no reply, but crashed over a fence into a lane, over a low post and rail on the other side, in time to see the hounds disappear over the fence at the far end of a large stubble field, with only Mr. Muddleton really with them.

"What a start Muddleton has got!" exclaimed the Squire, as he came up on Seaton's right.

"Yes," laughed the other; "if we don't catch them we shall never hear the end of this."

That there was a rattling scent, and that they were in for a quick thing, there could be no doubt; and, at present, the situation was this:—Muddleton was the only man who was really with the hounds. Next to him, came the huntsman, who, though a good bit behind, had got within reach of his hounds by, what I once heard described as, "the inscrutable ways of Providence."

Harry Beringer was leading the first flight; and, I am afraid, thinking but little of the two ladies he had volunteered to pilot. The Squire, Seaton, Miss Bridgeman, Rose, and some half-dozen others, came along pretty close upon Beringer's heels; and, behind them, at a considerable interval, thundered the ruck. A quarter-of-an-hour, and the scene was considerably changed. The huntsman had worked his way to the front; and Muddleton, who never had the decision requisite to hold his own in a quick thing, had come back to the first flight.



Harry Beringer still held pride of place, but he was beginning to ride his horse very carefully, for he knew that if, at this pace, a check did not ensue before the next ten minutes, he would have got to the bottom of him. Served by their light weights, the two girls, riding now somewhat wide of one another, came next. Then followed the Squire, and Major Seaton, who was with him, felt already that his horse showed signs of being outpaced. After crossing the next fence, they found themselves in a large grass field, at the farther end of which the tell-tale willows gave notice of water, while up the slope of the field, on the opposite side, the hounds were racing, with a breast-high scent.

“Harrington Brook!” shouted the Squire, as soon as he was over the fence. “For God’s sake pull up, Trixie. After all the rain we’ve had it must be a regular brimmer,” but it was not likely Miss Bridgeman was going to pay much heed to her father’s remonstrance while Rose Rawlinson was sending her bonny bay mare as straight as a line down towards the willows.

They saw the huntsman suddenly change his line and incline a little to the right, put his horse straight at the brook—and disappear.

“In it,” muttered Beringer, as he took his horse hard by the head, and turning in his saddle, he held up his hand with a warning gesture, and cried out, “Too big for you Miss Bridgeman, too big! pray leave it alone,” and bending forward once more over his horse’s withers he steadied him for a few strides and then, as he caught sight of the water, sent him at it with a will. He was over! and only just! As his horse struck out on the opposite side, he sent a



big lump of the bank behind him into the water, while his rider, once more turning in his saddle, cast an anxious look behind him at his fair followers.

“By heavens!” he exclaimed, “they are racing at it,” as the two girls, who had now converged upon his tracks, came down to the water almost stride for stride.

Beatrice set her teeth close as she neared it. Harrington Brook was one of the famous jumps in the West Clayfordshire country, and she knew it was one of Rose Rawlinson’s proudest boasts that she had once jumped it. She took one glance at her rival, but Rose’s calm, resolute face quite determined her. “I’ll drown!” she muttered, “sooner than pull bridle!”

Close upon it now! Rose is leading about half-a-length, another quick glance at her companion’s face, and Beatrice throws her heart to the other side, and rides her horse as boldly at it as man or woman need do! There has been no sign of blenching on the part of her rival, and the two girls rise at the brook almost simultaneously.

“Both safely over, thank God!” exclaims Harry Beringer, but no; Rose strides away, and as Beatrice’s horse strikes off to follow her example, the treacherous bank gives way, and Beatrice has barely time to kick her foot out of the stirrup and throw herself forward on to the bank before the luckless animal topples backward into the stream.

“Help! help! Mr. Beringer!” cried Rose, pulling up.

Beringer, who had just set his horse going again,



stopped as quickly as he could at the cry, threw himself off and ran back best pace to the brook. To his intense relief Miss Bridgeman struggled to her feet as he reached her,

“I hope you are not hurt?” he said anxiously.

“Nothing to signify,” said she lightly, “a few bruises, and I fancy I have sprained my wrist. But oh! my poor horse! Mr. Beringer, never mind me, but pray go to Sultan’s assistance.”

“All right,” he replied, “sit down here and keep quiet for a few minutes, and take a mouthful of sherry out of my flask. Horses are pretty clever, Miss Bridgeman, and no doubt with a little assistance, Sultan will get out either one side or the other. Ah! Miss Rawlinson, let me help you down before I go. I’ll leave you in charge,” and so saying Beringer ran back to the brook to look after the luckless Sultan.

He soon discovered that that plucky animal, after struggling desperately to recover his footing, had tumbled back into the water, and after drifting some three hundred yards farther down the stream, had once more succeeded in feeling his feet on a shelving portion of the bank, and luckily on the same side as he himself was. Beringer ran down the bank, but ere he could reach him Sultan had struggled up it, shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog, but none the worse for his mishap, unless the loss of his bridle could be called so. As he took him by his forelock and led him back to his mistress a “who-hoop” from the other side of the crest of the hill proclaimed the death of a fox, and as Harry Beringer rejoined the girls, he raised his hat and said, “I bring you back your pet, safe and



sound, Miss Bridgeman, and may congratulate you both upon being right in front through the quickest thing I ever rode, and being two out of the four who had Harrington Brook when a "brimmer."

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## CHAPTER V.

### "WARMINSTER MARKET."

YES, it had been the supreme effort of as straight a running fox as ever died in the open. He had struggled through Harrington Brook only to hear the fierce throated chorus behind him, and to know that his relentless foes, with bristles up, and gleaming eyes, were closing rapidly upon him. Just over the crest of the hill they rolled him over, and he died mute after the manner of his race, showing his glistening teeth and wicked snarl to the last.

Beatrice, by this, had pretty well recovered, and except for the strain of her wrist, was apparently no worse for her mishap than was Sultan.

Beringer lifted her on to her horse, and though his bridle was left at the bottom of the brook, their nags, after such a "bucketing" as they had had were all sober enough, and Sultan followed his companions meekly as a sheep.

By this time, the Squire, the Master and a good many of the first flight, who had taken advantage of a bridge a little lower down the stream, came up.

"Fairly cut down, by a couple of women," exclaimed the Master, as he raised his hat to Beatrice, "we ought to be downright ashamed of ourselves. All's well that ends well, Miss Bridgeman, but it was rash in the extreme to ride at Harrington Brook in



its present state, with the bridge only three hundred yards below you."

"You'd have done just the same if you had been in my place," retorted Beatrice, "and you know it, Mr. Roll," and the Master, to whom the jealousy of the two girls as to their riding was no secret, laughed, looked at them comically for a moment, and rejoined, "Well, perhaps I should."

"You'll go hunting no more, Trixie," exclaimed the Squire. "When you turn it into steeplechasing it's high time your horses went to the hammer."

"I'm sure it wasn't my fault, papa," rejoined Beatrice. "Whether it was that of the fox or Mr. Roll's flyers I leave you gentlemen to settle."

"As for you Rose," said the Squire, "you're just as bad, and I hope your father will either bind you over to good behaviour or sell that bonny bay mare."

But the heroines of the hour were speedily eclipsed by the arrival of Muddleton, bursting with the fulfilment of his vaticination. For once he had proved himself right, and the rest of the world wrong, and for a man who set himself in opposition to public opinion for the reason only that it was public opinion, and not from any logical deductions, this was indeed a triumph.

"I told you how it would be," he exclaimed, "but you would none of you hear of it. You think a fox is a bit of machinery, which only goes one way. You'll pay attention to me, perhaps, another time. Why, hang it, I had the hounds to myself for the first quarter-of-an-hour, and only I thought they were about to swing to the right I should have been the sole man with them when they killed."



"As it was," said Mr. Roll, "I don't think any one can claim that honour. What time do you make it, Bridgeman?"

"Five and twenty minutes," rejoined the Squire, "and I should think close upon five miles."

"By Jove," rejoined the Master, "it was a cracker. That's pretty well as fast as the Grand National. And now I think we'll trot off and look after another fox. With the exception of Jones the huntsman, none of us saw that one rolled over, and though he scrambled in and out of the brook pretty smartly, yet they had torn their fox pretty well to pieces before he got there."

And now the girls separated; with her sprained wrist and no bridle it was impossible for Miss Bridgeman to go on, and so she accordingly started for home, in charge of her father, leaving Rose and Mr. Beringer to continue their sport with the rest.

"Well, Miss Rawlinson," said Beringer, as he jogged along by her side towards the next cover, "I do wish Miss Bridgeman had got safe over. If she only had, we three should have been in at the death, and have had the honour of 'setting the field' at Harrington Brook."

"Yes," replied Rose, "it would have been great fun. You must know I jumped it once before and was highly complimented on the performance, but it hadn't half the water in it then, and indeed if I had dreamt it was so swollen as it is I don't think I should have attempted to go over it to-day."

"Oh! yes, you would," replied Beringer; "two such horsewomen as yourself and Miss Bridgeman are not likely to be troubled in that way, besides



a canal would not stop one when one is riding jealous."

"You don't mean to say, Mr. Beringer, that Miss Bridgeman and I were riding jealous?"

Beringer burst into a low laugh as he replied, "Well, Miss Rawlinson, if ever I did see jealous riding it was you two coming down to the brook. Why you were positively *racing* at it."

"You should always go fast at water," replied Rose demurely.

Again Harry Beringer smiled as he replied, "Well, as the Squire said, 'all has ended well,' but upon my word that was too big a water jump for ladies to ride at. I tell you fairly I quite thought it was odds I was in when I saw it myself, and I know I very nearly shared Miss Bridgeman's fate. I'm getting to like Warminster awfully; it's a terrible bore having to go away for a bit."

"Surely the regiment is not ordered away, is it?" said Rose.

"No," replied Beringer, "but I've an old uncle down in the West Country who always insists on my coming to him for about three weeks at Christmas. He is a good old fellow, and as his favourite nephew it is much to my interest to keep in with him."

"Then we shall lose you, I suppose?" said Miss Rawlinson.

"Yes, and sad to say, I shall lose a month's hunting."

"But why should you do that?" said Rose. "I suppose there are hounds down there as well as in West Clayfordshire?"

"Well, yes, they have a pack, but it really can't be called hunting. They don't kill a brace of foxes



in the season I hear, and it's an abominable country to ride over. But hark! there's a challenge. It's a fox for a sovereign. Come, Miss Rawlinson," he continued, "we're in for another gallop, listen to them," and as he spoke, hound after hound gave tongue in response to the first keynote.

They had a fair slow hunting run that afternoon, but who cares about the after-piece when the play of the occasion has been got through with. Still, certain it is that Harry Beringer lingered more beside Rose Rawlinson's side than was customary in one of the elect of the hard riding brigade. True, the lady herself might be deemed of that fraternity, and the hunting no doubt was slow, and this perhaps gave more reason for the circumstance being noted by the seniors of West Clayfordshire than when they were more actually engaged, and one or two of them exchanged a wink and observed that young Beringer seemed rather gone on Rose Rawlinson.

"Plays the devil with their riding till they've either got over it or got married," observed a cynical old bachelor, "but Lord how they do go then."

"Well, Mr. Beringer," said Rose, as they rode slowly home together after having lost their fox. "We are always apt to think that our last day's fun is our best, whatever it may be, but I do think that *this* must go down as my red-lettered day of all days in the hunting-field."

"Rather," rejoined Beringer. "You've been right in front, Miss Rawlinson, during the fastest thing I ever saw, and practically 'set the field' at the finish. There were really only you and I left in it, and your mare had more left in her than mine. You



would have beaten me up to the hounds, if we hadn't pulled up on account of Miss Bridgeman."

"I don't know about that," rejoined Rose, "but I turn off here. Good-bye, and a pleasant journey to you, Mr. Beringer. Come back to us soon."

He pressed the little hand extended to him, then raised his hat in adieu, and as he jogged slowly home to Warminster, he thought to himself, "By Jove, what a handsome girl she is, and so is the other. To see those two come down stride for stride at that brook with what some one has called 'the light of battle' on their faces, was a sight to see and one I may live to a hundred and never see again. Not ride jealous. Either of them would have broken their necks sooner than pulled bridle. It's a sad pity; they are the two nicest girls I ever met, and d—mne I don't know which I like best. However, I can't marry them both, nor for the matter of that even one if she'd have me. No, till the old uncle in the 'West Countree' demises in my favour, I must remain perforce a bachelor."

The next was market-day in Warminster. The farmers from all round the country flocked into the city, whether they had anything to sell or not; their wives or daughters had always something to get for the house, then it behoved that they themselves should know how prices were ruling, and above all, was not all the gossip of West Clayfordshire to be picked up at Warminster market. It was the magistrates' day besides, when the offenders of the week heard the penalty of their misdeeds pronounced against them, and the recalcitrant poacher, who thanks to recent legislation finds his illicit industry much interfered with, was confronted with



the landlords whom he had plundered. Nowadays the procuring of a hare bids fair to entail more hard work than profit.

Ralph Bridgeman had been slow to recognise the badness of the times. True he knew very well that he had lost money by his own farm for the last three years, but then he never recollected making much out of it, and as he had no rent to pay, and did not keep very accurate accounts, he hardly realised how much he was out on the twelve months. He knew that it must be going hard with his tenants. His neighbours, Muddleton for instance, wondered how it was all to end, and said farmers had never had to face such a run of bad luck since they could remember, and the Squire was, it need hardly be said, farmer enough to see that things agricultural were in a critical condition. Still he had not troubled his mind much about it till he got a petition from his tenantry for a remission of twenty per cent. on their rents. A suggestion to reduce a man's income by a fifth, is sure to arouse the attention of the most careless landlord, and Ralph Bridgeman was very far from that. He told Rawlinson, who was spokesman of the deputation, that he would take it into consideration, and if he deemed twenty per cent. reasonable, they should have it, but that in any case a remission of some kind would be granted them."

"Well, Rawlinson," said the Squire, as he made his way through the market-place, "how's corn going, in there?" and he jerked his head in the direction of the Corn Exchange.

"Why, sir, the best wheat's only fetching about thirty-four to thirty-five a quarter. It's ruination,



Squire. It costs me about that to grow. I don't want to grumble, but we'll be all clean broke, if things don't mend."

"It's very bad," rejoined Ralph Bridgeman, "and sad to say, I hear from Mr. Muddleton, that two old tenants of his are going to throw up their farms because they are broke. He says, though, they never put by for a rainy day."

"Yes," replied Rawlinson, "it's easy to say that, and no doubt many of us could have put the screw on a little closer if we had guessed what was coming. As for that Mott he was a bad farmer, and spent all his time horse-coping, but John Cornflower was a careful man, and I know he'd a snug sum put by, but the fact is, Squire, like the rest of us, he's about come to the end of it."

"I am sorry for *him*," said Ralph Bridgeman; "as for Mott, as you say, he wasn't much account, a drunken blackguard. I always wondered Muddleton stood him so long. Well, Rawlinson, I have talked your request over with my brother landlords, and we think something must be done on our parts. Anyway, I think you'll all be satisfied on audit day."

"Thank you, sir," replied the farmer. The Squire, with a nod, was about to turn away when an idea suddenly occurred to him. "Oh, Rawlinson," he exclaimed, "how splendidly your daughter went yesterday. To have Harrington Brook, such a brimmer as it is now, would be a feather in any *man's* cap in the hunt; but I want you to do one thing, just you pitch into Rose about her riding. I told Miss Bridgeman that I would sell all her hunters if she



didn't ride more prudently. Those two girls can ride, and no mistake, but they have taken to ride jealous of each other, and the end of it will be a bad accident to one or the other."

"Ah! well, Squire, there will be pretty soon an end to Rose's hunting! I can't afford to keep 'Bay Bella' much longer."

"Pooh! nonsense, man! You will never dream of selling your daughter's mare, such a clipper as she is too?"

"Needs must when the devil drives. I don't want to talk about it to you, Squire! You are doing all you can for us in remission of rent, but I am driven for ready money. I have never grudged my girl anything, but the mare will have to go! She ought to fetch a hundred or a hundred and twenty."

"I'd take her off your hands, Rawlinson, at the latter figure, in a minute, but I can't believe it's as bad as that; however, don't forget to give me the first offer if you do part with her."

"You may put it down now, Squire," replied John Rawlinson gloomily. "It's the only way I see of coming by a hundred without paying through the nose for it! I have been trying to do business all the morning, but it's ruination to sell corn at the present price."

"Well, never mind, man," said Ralph Bridgeman, "hold on a bit and things may improve, but always remember that if you really do want to part with the mare, my cheque is ready," and with that the two men parted.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SALE OF BAY BELLA.

MR. BERINGER had obtained a month's leave of absence, and never was a young gentleman more depressed at starting for his holiday than he was. In good sooth, he would very much rather have remained at Warminster, which he voted one of the pleasantest quarters that he had been in for a long time; a very pleasant neighbourhood, with which he was now well acquainted. Capital hunting, and very good barracks, what more could a soldier want? All this he had to exchange for a dull house in the neighbourhood of Plymouth, and the society of an irritable old gentleman and his somewhat antediluvian cronies. Still, we all sacrifice to Mammon, and people who have money to leave behind them usually exact a certain amount of attention as a condition of inheritance. Mr. Beringer, however, determined to make the best of it, and after paying a three weeks' visit to his uncle, to reward himself with a week in London on his return journey to Warminster. He had said good-bye to Rose Rawlinson yesterday, but common courtesy, he thought, demanded that he should ride over to Gore Court, inquire after Miss Bridgeman's sprained wrist, and make his adieux. That she was none the worse for her fall he had ascertained from the Squire, who had lunched at the barracks, as he constantly did on a



market-day. So after luncheon, Mr. Beringer ordered his hack, and cantered over to Gore Court. The ladies were at home, and he was shown into the drawing-room, where he found Aunt Barbara and Beatrice, the latter with her right arm in a sling.

"I'm sorry to see that you are more hurt than we had hoped," said Beringer.

"I sprained my wrist rather badly," she replied smiling; "but it is worth spraining both wrists to ride such a gallop as that. Ah! if that treacherous bank had not failed poor Sultan we should have been the only three in at the death. It was awfully good of you and Rose to stop and pick me up."

"Why, what would you have had the man do?" snapped Aunt Barbara. "After leading you into mischief he couldn't leave you in the brook to drown. Ah! Mr. Beringer, I've a pretty crow to pluck with you."

"I assure you, Miss Kurzon—" stammered Harry.

"Nonsense, auntie," interposed Beatrice, "you know I wasn't in the water at all. It was only my horse."

"Mr. Beringer," continued Aunt Barbara, heedless of the interruption, "you act as pilot to these two young ladies, and when the young monkeys begin racing, you encourage them in it."

"I protest, Miss Kurzon, I did my best to stop them. I called out to them it was too big."

"But why didn't you stop yourself, sir?" said Aunt Barbara sharply. "You've a right to risk your own neck if you like. But I won't——"

"Stop myself," interrupted Harry Beringer, "what with hounds running like that!" and the



utter bewilderment of his face sent both Miss Kurzon and Beatrice into fits of laughter.

"Well," said Aunt Barbara, as soon as she had recovered her gravity, "I suppose that *was* too much to expect from any man your age. But, Mr. Beringer, when you undertake to play pilot, you should do it with more discretion. I'm not one of those old ladies who think girls shouldn't hunt. But I do hold they've no business to ride at such places as Harrington Brook. There!" she concluded, with a little snort of defiance, and a glance at her niece, "I told Beatrice I should blow you up, and I've done it; mind you don't do so again."

"You mustn't mind Aunt Barbara, Mr. Beringer," said the girl. "It's not such a great many years ago when, under the circumstances, you would have no more stopped her at Harrington Brook than you did me."

"Bless the child," said Miss Kurzon laughing heartily, and gratified by the compliment, both to her years and her horsemanship, "how dare you say such a thing?"

"It was so, all the same," replied Beatrice. "It's not long ago since Mr. Muddleton rather took the conceit out of me, and I thought I'd gone rather well that day too."

"How was that?" enquired Miss Kurzon.

"Well, he told me I should never ride as well as my aunt, if I lived to be a hundred."

"What an old brute," muttered Harry.

"Don't listen to her, Mr. Beringer. Although nobody loved a good gallop better than I did when I was a girl."



"Did you do much after I left you?" enquired Beatrice.

"No, we found, and had a slow pottering run, but after the *bon bouche* of the morning, it all seemed, flat, stale and unprofitable."

And now the conversation turned upon divers gaieties that were expected to take place in the neighbourhood, some of which near at hand Miss Bridgeman expressed much regret, that her sprained wrist would prevent her from attending, while Mr. Beringer also deplored that his involuntary absence from Warminster would put him in the same category.

"Let's make a compact, Miss Bridgeman," exclaimed Harry. "If you will promise to be quite well by the Byster ball, I will pledge myself to get back from Devonshire for it."

"It's a bargain," said Beatrice, "and there's my left hand on it."

"Well," said Miss Kurzon, as the two young people shook hands over their compact, "it will be a hard case, Trixie, if you are not well by that. But you're rather a bad subject, my dear, for a sprain for which, remember, the only cure is perfect rest."

"Well, I must be going," said Beringer, "and I'll ring for my horse, if you'll allow me. Miss Kurzon is quite right about a sprain, and one thing more, Miss Bridgeman, don't begin to use your wrist too soon."

"No fear," rejoined Beatrice laughing, "you will find me all ready for another lead when you return. Do you know I'm rather glad to know that you'll get no hunting in Devonshire, because I also am out of it for the present," and Miss Bridgeman



touched her wrist significantly, "nice selfish remark to say good-bye with, is it not?"

"Well, it is rather," rejoined Beringer, "but I forgive it. Good-bye, Miss Kurzon, good-bye and mind you keep the first valse for me, at Byster, Miss Bridgeman," and with this Harry Beringer took his departure.

When the Squire came home that night, he said to his daughter:

"I'm afraid I've done a foolish thing, Trixie, but I never could pass a good horse. I as good as bought another for you this afternoon, and with that damaged wrist I am sure you don't want it."

"Oh, the wrist will soon be round again, never fear, papa. But I should just for once like to have three good horses for the season. Where did you get it? Who did you buy it from?"

"From John Rawlinson; it's that bay mare his daughter rides."

"Oh, papa, how could you, and how could he. It'll break Rose's heart. There's no possession she has she values like Bay Bella."

"Well, Trixie, it's just this way, times are so bad, Rawlinson says he must have some money to go on with. I'm giving the tenants twenty per cent. back on the rents this month, and I can't lend them money besides—not, remember, that Rawlinson even suggested it. It's a case of if not me, another. He's going to sell the mare, says he must. I may as well give him his price as anyone else."

"Yes, papa, but oh! I am so sorry for Rose. Stay, I suppose I can lend her Bay Bella if I like."

"Certainly, you may do what you choose with



your own horses, bar sell them. Stop," continued the Squire laughing, "there's one thing more I lay an embargo on, after yesterday, you're not to lend that mare to Rose Rawlinson for the simple gratification of racing against her."

As John Rawlinson rode home from Warminster market that evening he was very troubled in his own mind. He had as good as sold Bay Bella to the Squire and he knew that this would be a very sore subject with his daughter. He was very fond of Rose, and very proud of her; proud of her beauty, proud of her horsemanship, and proud that she had been brought up a lady. He had always given her everything she wanted and he knew that this selling her favourite mare would be grief and mortification to her. But what was he to do? He was sore pressed for ready money, and for the life of him could see no other manner of obtaining it. He got off his horse, with a heavy heart, on arriving at The Lees, as his farm was called, and strode into the parlour where the table was already laid for supper.

"Well, John, what did you do at the market?" enquired his wife.

"Something I'm main sorry for," he replied, "and yet for the life of me I don't see how I could help it. Corn, wool, all farm produce is down to nothing. It's madness to sell at present prices; hold on I must, and, at the same time, I must have ready money to go on with. The only thing I can part with, that'll fetch its full value, at the present moment, is that mare of Rose's."

"Well," rejoined his wife, "it'll be a sore disappointment for the girl; but she'll have to make



up her mind to it. We've all got our crosses to bear in this world, and Rose must bear hers like any other young woman. She's had a deal of fun out of it, and now times are so bad she can't expect you to keep a riding horse for her.

Mrs. Rawlinson had always been of opinion that Rose was what she termed "a deal too much petted and pampered." The way that the girl had been brought up had been chiefly her father's doing; as Mrs. Rawlinson would sometimes, and perhaps rightly, assert, "if she had had her way about her daughter's bringing up, she might not have been able to play the p-ianner, but she would have been a good dairy woman, or she—Mrs. Rawlinson—would have known the reason why," but her husband was a man who was most emphatically master of his own house; and, though she ruled her dependants most despotically, Mrs. Rawlinson knew better than to cross him.

"Where is Rose?" he enquired after a little. "I must go and tell her this myself."

"In the sitting-room, I believe; leastways I heard her p-ianner going just now."

John Rawlinson made no reply, but as his wife bustled off to the kitchen, he crossed the hall and entered the sitting-room, where he found his daughter sitting by the fireside, immersed in a book. She laid it down as he entered, and rose to greet him.

"You're late back, father," she said; "and judging by your face, have had an unsatisfactory day."

"The days seem all unsatisfactory now, and what's to become of us farmers I don't know."



Farm produce of all sorts seems simply unsaleable. Even stock is falling. Folks say they've no winter keep for their bullocks."

"It's bad, father," said Rose, "and I wish I could be some help to you in your troubles, but I can't."

"But it so happens you can, Rose," rejoined John Rawlinson. "I'm driven very hard for ready money. When a farmer is that, we all know he's bound to sell something; and the first question he asks himself is, what he can spare best, and what will fetch its full value?"

"That's clear enough, father," replied Rose, "but I don't see how I can be any help to you."

"I think," continued John Rawlinson, "I've always been a kind and indulgent father to you?"

"The best and kindest," murmured Rose, with a consciousness that something unpleasant was impending.

"And, therefore," he went on, "you can't suppose that if I could help it I'd do what I've as good as done."

"What's that?" she ejaculated.

"I shall have to sell Bay Bella."

"Oh, father," she cried, and the tears welled up into her eyes at the bare thought of parting with her favourite.

"There, the murder's out, child," said John Rawlinson, "and, believe me, if I saw any other way out of the corner I'm in I would take it; but I don't. I can only say, Rosie, don't cry over it more than you can help."

"I won't; I'll try and be brave, father; but is—is she going into good hands? Who has bought her?" asked Rose, with a hysterical little sob.



"The Squire," replied John Rawlinson, as he turned on his heel and passed out of the room.

Left to herself, Rose indulged in all the relief of a good cry over the impending loss of her favourite. Then her heart rose in fierce rebellion against the injustice of our different lots in this life. She was as pretty, as clever, and as well educated as Miss Bridgeman, and yet how different were their positions. She rode as well as Beatrice, and now she supposed, through Miss Bridgeman's jealousy, she was to be deprived of her favourite pastime. It was a case of Naboth's Vineyard. The Squire's daughter had already a couple of horses of her own, to say nothing of being able to always borrow one from her father if she wanted it; and yet nothing would satisfy her, but that she must have Bay Bella besides. She never thought Beatrice would have been so mean, was it likely that the Squire would have thought of buying Bay Bella if his daughter had not urged him to do so. Mr. Bridgeman was a veritable Ahab; he had taken advantage of his tenant's necessities to purchase from him the mare Beatrice coveted. And then Rose's thoughts really became so very uncomplimentary to Miss Bridgeman that she ought to have been ashamed of herself. She mentally accused Beatrice of being a flirt and a coquette, of endeavouring to lure all the young men to her side, of displaying uncontrollable jealousy if any man showed the slightest admiration for any other girl in her presence, and then, feeling she was at war with the world in general, and with Beatrice Bridgeman in particular, Rose dried her eyes and went into supper with what appetite she might.



Absurd to cry and lose your temper about such a thing, but I think there are many who would call the loss of a horse on which they had well-nigh set the field in the middle of the hunting season, ample matter for lamentation.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### AN UNEXPECTED STRANGER.

THREE days were gone, and to use poor Rose's expression, "the sacrifice was consummated," or as her mother more tersely put it "the mare was sold," and Ralph Bridgeman's cheque was in her father's pocket. She had strolled gloomily across to the stable, to take leave of the favourite she should never ride again, and as she remembered that the West Clayfordshire met within easy distance next morning, thought bitterly over the irony of fate that gave to the daughter of Gore Court hunters that for the present she could not ride, and condemned herself to forego the sport she loved so well.

"Yes, my Bella," she muttered, as she stood in the mare's box, presenting her with the apple which Bella so dearly loved, "we've had our last gallop together, and it's something to be proud of, my pet, that our sun set in splendour. We did jump Harrington Brook before we parted, my dear, and we would have shown them the way to-morrow, wouldn't we, if it hadn't been——" and here Rose's feelings became quite too much for her, and she



could only cry quietly, and fondle Bella's greedy nose, which was thrust persistently into her hand in search of more apple.

"Here's a note for you, Rose, just come from the Court," screamed her mother across the stable yard, "and the man wants to know whether there's an answer."

Thus adjured, Miss Rawlinson speedily dried her tears, and tripped across the cobbles to see what her note might mean. It was addressed in a queer, straggling, irregular hand that puzzled her, and it was not until she had torn it open, and cast a hasty glance at the signature, that she was aware it was from Beatrice, and the slight mystery of the writing was explained by the fact of her sprained wrist obliging her to do the best she could with her left hand.

"DEAR ROSE," it ran,

"I have only just learnt for certain that your father is compelled to part with Bay Bella, and that my father is her purchaser. He has nobly presented her to me, and my first act of possession is to request that you will keep her and ride her for me till the end of the hunting season at all events. I sincerely trust that things may mend all round, and that a future arrangement will provide for Bay Bella's not leaving the stable of Lees Farm. Nobody, Rose, can ride her like you, though I'm not sure Sultan and myself can't hold our own with you. You will *oblige* me I know about this. I am a cripple at present, and I shall have no time to get into Bella's ways this year, and I *trust* no opportunity next.

"May we ride such another run as last Friday's,



side by side again, and have Harrington Brook to wind up with.

“Remember my wrist and excuse this scrawl.

“Yours affectionately,

“BEATRICE BRIDGEMAN.”

“What a little beast I have been,” muttered Rose to herself. “I’ve accused her of coveting my mare, of inciting her father to buy it for her, and the moment she finds it her property she writes me this note. I’m a black-hearted little wretch, and the world is nothing like so bad as it is painted.”

And then Miss Rose sat down and wrote a letter of grateful gush to her old girlish playfellow, and asked leave to call and see her next day, a thing that Miss Bridgeman, considering the circumstances under which her accident had occurred, and Rose’s knowledge of it, was a little surprised she had not already thought fit to do. But it was impossible for Miss Bridgeman to guess all the jealousy circumstances had aroused in Rose Rawlinson’s breast, and moreover there was a latent jealousy as yet unacknowledged by either with regard to Harry Beringer. Before going up to Gore Court, Rose had a long talk with her father, and ascertained that far from the Squire having greedily sought to buy Bay Bella, it was her father who had offered the mare to him, that Ralph Bridgeman, far from snapping at the offer, had said that he hoped things were not so bad as that, but that if it came to the worst, and Bay Bella really was to be sold, he should like to have the first offer of her. In short, Rose became conscious that she had done Beatrice Bridgeman gross injustice, and went over to the Court in a



penitent and remorseful frame of mind. As for Beatrice she had no idea of the storm of jealousy that had swept across the mind of her humble friend. She was full of pity for her, on account of the blow she had received on hearing that her favourite mare was no longer hers, and no sooner did they meet than she strove to reassure Rose upon this point.

"Of course, my dear, it musn't be, and cannot be. Bay Bella will remain with you all the winter, and will be as she always has been, right in the van of the West Clayfordshire. I really couldn't ride her, if I had her, which I hope I never shall. Papa will never hold Mr. Rawlinson to his bargain, times will mend, and we must look upon it that your pet is merely a security for some money my father has advanced yours till they do."

"It's very good of you to say so," said Rose, "but from what my father and brothers say, I'm afraid there's a poor chance of that. There's likely to be very little hunting for the farmers in the future."

"Oh, nonsense," laughed Beatrice, "farmers we know are privileged grumblers. In the meantime, remember, it will be a fortnight most likely before I'm out again, and I look to you to let me know all that goes on in the hunting-field."

Rose shook her head in reply. In good truth she gauged the agricultural outlook much more accurately than did the Squire's daughter; and then she bade Miss Bridgeman an affectionate farewell.

January slips rapidly away, and Beatrice has once more taken her place in the hunting-field. The two girls have enjoyed more than one good run



together, but never such a gallop as they had had that day from the Shaws. Of Harry Beringer there is no news. He had departed for the West Country as arranged, and even his regiment seemed to have heard nothing of him since. Military men, as a rule, are not much given to letter-writing, and when on short leave of absence seldom trouble their comrades with an account of their sayings and doings. The Byster Ball was getting near at hand, and though they said nothing to each other on the subject, both girls were much exercised in their minds concerning it.

Beatrice was wondering whether Mr. Beringer would keep his tryst, while Rose was turning over in her mind the possibility of being present at it. The Byster, like all other country balls, was open to any one who chose to pay for a ticket. Most of the county people in the neighbourhood patronised it, but it was further attended by a sprinkling of the leading professional men in the town with their families, and also by some of the large farmers in the vicinity.

Rose generally contrived to compass two or three such balls in the course of the winter. She made the acquaintance of a sprinkling of the young men, both of her own class, and of those above it, in the hunting-field, and such a pretty, attractive girl was not likely to want partners when she reached the ball-room, but the getting somebody to take her there was always a matter fraught with some little difficulty.

Mrs. Rawlinson rather set her face against what she termed gadding about amongst her betters. To go to the dance at Gore Court was all very



well. That was an annual entertainment of their landlord's, and nobody enjoyed it more than she. There was always some theatrical representation to start with, which amused her, and there were lots of her neighbours afterwards with whom to gossip. But Byster was ten miles off, and Mrs. Rawlinson was quite aware that she would have very few acquaintances there, and curtly summed up the situation with the observation that "those balls were not for the likes of them." Rose, on her side, was by no means anxious to have her mother for a chaperone. Not only was Mrs. Rawlinson a somewhat arbitrary and fidgetty old lady, but her taste in dress was more garish than was quite in accordance with good taste. As the good woman said, "she liked a bit of colour," and she might have added, and a *good bit* too, as some of her best gowns testified. Rose was cruelly sensitive on these points. She was fond of her mother, but terribly alive to the faults of her speech, dress and manner. However, it was just possible that the Squire might ask her to join his party. He did, occasionally, and if not, she must contrive to get hold of some other chaperone.

One morning Bristow, the stud-groom, came up to the house and announced that he wished to see the Squire. He was duly ushered into Mr. Bridgeman's study, and his master at once said, "Well, Bristow, what is it? You look as if you were bursting with intelligence of some kind."

"Well, sir," replied the stud-groom, "you know Golden Dream, 'your bargain,' as Miss Beatrice jokingly calls her? Well, she's as good blood as any in England. Cornflower picked her up for a



song, because they didn't believe she would breed. Well, sir, I'm jiggered if she isn't in foal!"

"You don't say so, Bristow. By Jove! who will say she isn't a bargain now? If that foal is only born alive, it will be worth all I gave for its mother, but I tell you what, we shall have a little trouble to find out the sire. You had better see Cornflower, and ask him of whom he bought the mare. He can't know anything himself, because he believed her to be barren, as did the people from whom he bought her, but the latter can, no doubt, tell you what the sire must be."

"Very good, sir," said Bristow. "I'll ride over to Cornflower's at once, for I'm sorry to hear he is throwing up his farm and leaving the country at Lady Day."

"Quite right," said the Squire. "If we lose sight of him we shall probably have considerable difficulty in getting at what we want."

Very jubilant was the Squire at this unexpected result of his bargain. He knew that, bred as she was, Golden Dream would never have been let go, if she had not been deemed useless for breeding purposes. Now she turned out to be in foal, and if the mare gave birth to one, there was no reason why she should not be the mother of a long line of children. True, no one could say how these might turn out—what this coming little stranger might be no one could say. The late owners of Golden Dream might have bred injudiciously from her. But the Squire, in his sanguine temperament, thought that even should this first foal turn out a failure, yet things might be different when the mare was more cleverly mated. Little did Ralph Bridgeman



think how Golden Dream would realise her name.

Suddenly a strange whisper ran through the streets of Warminster, which, as a matter of course, was some time before it reached the ears of those most concerned. It had probably been in circulation some hours, when one of the sergeants of the regiment came to Major Seaton's quarters and said, "There is a rumour all through the town, and all over the barracks, too, that I think you and the other officers ought, at all events, to know about."

"Well, Armstrong," said the major interrogatively, as the sergeant paused :

"They say, sir, Mr. Beringer is in the custody of the London police."

"What for?" ejaculated the major shortly.

"Nobody seems to know, sir—nobody seems to be able to say anything more about it than that he was seen by one of the townspeople in the custody of two policemen at Waterloo Station."

"Seen, man, who saw him?" said Major Seaton sharply.

"I don't know, sir," replied the sergeant.

"Nonsense, Armstrong. We can't have a story of that sort flying about without knowing who circulated it. Endeavour at once to come to the townsman who has started such a lie about an officer of the regiment, and, by the Lord, if we can't trounce him for libel, I hope the men will give him a turn through a horse-pond."

"The men won't want any prompting in that way, sir," replied the sergeant with a grim smile, "but as to who brought the tale to Warminster, I can't say."



"You will do your best to find out, and so shall I," replied Major Seaton; "and we ought to get at the teller of the tale before nightfall. That'll do. Look in again after the dressing bugle has gone."

The major was very soon flitting about Warminster, and at once found Sergeant Armstrong's information to be perfectly correct. The town was full of the story, and by dint of unwearied pertinacity he succeeded at last in tracing the report to its fountain-head. It seemed that the foreman of the leading saddler in the town, who had been on a short visit to some friends, had seen Mr. Beringer in the custody of two policemen at Waterloo Station. This was quite enough for Major Seaton. He was off to Merriman's, the tradesman in question, at once, and peremptorily demanded to see his foreman.

"Ah! major," said Mr. Merriman, "of course you want to see Josh about this story he has brought down. It's a queer start it is; but he is a thoughtful young man is Josh, and mind you, he don't pretend to know anything about it, except what he saw. Send him here? Quite so, major. No doubt you'd like to talk to him yourself."

Joshua Hogg, on being confronted with Major Seaton, told his little story, briefly, firmly, and plainly. He was at Waterloo Station on the Thursday night, looking for his train to Warminster. By mistake, he got on to the wrong platform; he there saw Mr. Beringer, who had just arrived by some other train, taken into custody, on stepping out of the carriage, by two policemen, who had apparently been awaiting his arrival. The occurrence had attracted a slight crowd, which drew his attention;



he had no time to see more, as he had to catch his own train, and did not know in the least why Mr. Beringer was taken into custody, but was perfectly sure it was him; had seen him in that shop scores of times. Neither knew nor wished to say anything more about him.

Major Seaton walked back to barracks more mystified than he had ever been in his life. Young men would be young men, and that subalterns on leave, partly from their own folly, and partly from the combination of circumstances, would get into nocturnal scrapes in London, he was aware, but that Harry Beringer should be arrested in cold blood on getting out of a railway train passed the major's comprehension.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A RAILWAY ADVENTURE.

ALTHOUGH the Major kept his own counsel, it was not to be supposed that such a piece of scandal as this would not reach the ears of the other officers of the corps. At the mess-table it was the one topic of conversation, and what on earth could have brought Harry Beringer within the clutch of the law, was subject of the wildest conjecture. That he might have got into a row at night in town was easy to be understood, but that two policeman should arrest him on getting out of a train in the afternoon was a most singular and cold-blooded proceeding. Major Seaton, on his appearance, was at once



appealed to as to whether he had any information on the subject, for, despite the disparity in their ages there was a warm friendship between the Major and the young Lieutenant. No, the Major could tell them no more than they already knew. He had traced the thing to its fountain head, had seen Joshua Hogg, Merriman's foreman, who had brought the intelligence and witnessed the occurrence, but the man could tell no more than that he knew Mr. Beringer perfectly, and could swear to having seen him arrested as he described, and Her Majesty's —th were doomed to go to bed, wondering what on earth had happened to their unfortunate comrade.

But the next morning brought a letter for Major Seaton, which utterly astounded him. He read the few lines through, twice, and even then could hardly believe that he had read them aright.

“DEAR MAJOR,” it ran,

“If you can, I hope you will run up to town and testify to my position and character, I am the victim of a most awkward combination of circumstances, and am at present in the hands of the police on a charge of attempted murder. I need scarcely say that I am perfectly guiltless, and I fancy the police are equally of that opinion, at the same time I can't say that I am surprised that I am detained. It's as queer an adventure as ever befel a man, and, after the Lefroy case, I can hardly expect to be allowed to depart until they have, at all events, thoroughly satisfied themselves as to who and what I am.

“Yours most sincerely,

“HARRY BERINGER.”



The Major was a man of prompt decision, telling his servant to pack his portmanteau, he went across to the Colonel's quarters, showed him the letter, obtained his permission to run up to town, and was off by the very next train.

He found Beringer still detained at the Police Station, although treated with every courtesy and consideration, and then heard from his own lips his extraordinary story.

"It so happened," he said, "that I had been at a dance the night before I had left Plymouth, and feeling somewhat tired and sleepy, I asked the guard if he could put me into a compartment where I could have a smoke and not be disturbed; he replied, there wasn't one quite empty, but he put me into one in which there was only one other passenger, who, wrapped up in a big coat and heavy rug, was apparently already fast asleep. I lit my pipe, and after smoking for a short time followed his example. I slept very soundly for some time, when I was half awakened by the cold; it was deuced cold. I pulled up the collar of my coat, wrapped the rug more closely round my legs, and, without opening my eyes, made a determined effort to continue my slumbers, but it was no use, so giving it up I shook myself and sat up, and then by Jove! I was wide-awake in a moment. The far door from me of the carriage was open, and my fellow passenger was gone! A rough overcoat, a rug, a hat, and an umbrella were lying on the seat, but my companion was gone! The open door accounted for my feeling it so cold, but when, or why, my fellow passenger had quitted the train I had no conception. Well, it was the express train, the Flying Dutchman I think



they call it, and the consequence was I had no opportunity of communicating with anybody till we got to Salisbury. There, I called the guard, and told him what had occurred. It did not strike me at first, but I soon perceived that I was an object of considerable suspicion. Attired in a rough frieze ulster, and a slouch hat, I've no doubt my appearance was not prepossessing. Of course, when I told my story, I told my name and regiment, but I saw a somewhat incredulous look in the officials' faces, and an unmistakable disposition to prevent my leaving the carriage. Well, I got in again, and on we went, and the train once more started. And now I grasped in what a very awkward situation I was placed, and began to think over what I had best do.

"When we reached Waterloo, I found two policemen awaiting me on the platform, who very civilly told me I must consider myself in custody, until my fellow traveller had been discovered."

"In short," said Major Seaton, "they believe you to have assaulted this man and thrown him out of the carriage."

"Just so," rejoined Beringer.

"And have they ascertained yet what became of the fellow?" asked the Major.

"Oh, yes," said Harry. "A telegram came early this morning to say that he had been picked up on the line, a little further down than where I missed him, and, though a good bit cut and shaken, has apparently suffered no serious injury."

"And what account does he give of the affair?" asked the Major.

"They haven't heard yet, he is very likely too shaken at present to say how he came to fall out of



the carriage, for it is hard to suppose that he voluntarily jumped out."

Here they were interrupted by the inspector, who said that now they were perfectly satisfied with Mr. Beringer's identity he had orders to detain him no longer, and would simply request him to leave his address. He and Major Seaton, therefore, jumped into a cab and proceeded to an hotel, and then Beringer suddenly exclaimed:

"I shall get to the Byster ball after all, Major."

"I had forgotten all about it," said Major Seaton; "of course, it's to night, but if you *mean* the Byster ball our best plan is to pass through Warminster and go straight to Byster."

"And that is what we'll do Major," exclaimed Beringer excitedly. "In the meantime I am going to dress, for I've a sort of been-up-all-night feeling about me. Got the prison taint on I suppose," he continued laughing.

"Yes," said the Major meditatively, "I suppose forty-eight hours in custody does give that feeling, however little we may have deserved it." And then the Major strolled off to the coffee-room to confer with the waiters on the subject of dinner.

When Beringer joined him some half-an-hour later, he said: "I shall have to ask you to be my banker for the present, Major; it is a great sell, but I fancy I have cleared up my fellow passenger's exit."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Major.

"Yes," rejoined Beringer. "My uncle, two or three days before I left, presented me with a cheque for a hundred. As I was getting short of money I rode into Plymouth and cashed it; my purse con-



taining ten crisp ten-pound Bank of England notes, I placed at the top of my dressing bag; to get at my pipe and tobacco, I opened that bag, and I suppose left it open, at all events, when I opened it just now there was the purse but with never a note in it. My impression is that my companion took advantage of my being asleep to peep into my bag, saw the purse at the top, and having possessed himself of its contents was only too anxious to depart with his plunder. Whether he thought the train was just slackening speed to pass a station or what I don't know, but I fancy he thought he had a fair chance of jumping out, and what's more, it seems he did it better than could have been supposed.

"And the police, of course, don't know of your loss," said the Major.

"Certainly not, didn't know it myself till a few minutes ago."

"H'um! we shall have to drive back to the police station. It's all clear as daylight. The bank at which you cashed the cheque are sure to know the numbers of the notes they gave you, and instead of your being brought up for murder, your quondam companion will be paraded for robbery."

"I think so," replied Beringer, "but it is a deuce of a bore going back to the police station. Its running it fine, and I really do want to be at the Byster ball."

"Never fear. Sharp's the word. Here, waiter! Hansom at once, and that dinner to be ready in three-quarters of an hour. Now, come along."

Of course the information Beringer now had to



give the police put a very different aspect on the affair.

"It's all pretty clear now, sir," said the inspector, "that fellow saw the purse at the top of your bag, and also saw you were very sound asleep. When he saw the haul it contained he couldn't resist the temptation, and was most likely deceived, as you suggest, by the train slackening its speed to run through a station. However, as you cashed the cheque at a bank, they would be sure to take the number of the notes they gave you, and the probability is this fellow has the notes about him still. He's rather too shaken to attempt to leave the hospital for a day or two from what we hear, and we shall telegraph down that he is to be at once taken into custody and searched."

"Regular case of tit-for-tat," observed Major Seaton, "you are taken into custody for his murder, and he is taken into custody for robbing you."

"Just so," said the inspector, laughing. "You will, of course, have to prosecute, sir, but we have your address, and will let you know when we want you."

"All right," said Harry. "Come along, Major, there's nothing more to detain us here."

"Nothing, sir," rejoined the inspector, and jumping into their cab the two men were speedily driven back to their hotel.

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The fiddles were in full swing at Byster, and every one was agreeing that it promised to be a capital ball. The one topic of conversation that permeated the room was the extraordinary report of the arrest of Mr. Beringer. The cause of



his arrest was unknown, for Major Seaton and the Colonel had kept their own counsel, but that he had been arrested had even furnished matter for a paragraph in the local paper, headed: "Extraordinary Arrest of an Officer." Even his brother officers, several of whom were present, made no attempt to deny the fact, but admitted that the story was true, that they didn't at present know what for, but they believed it to be all a mistake, and that Major Seaton had gone up to town expressly "to see Beringer through it," as one young gentleman expressed it to Miss Bridgeman. Beatrice was excessively put out at Harry's not keeping his tryst. True, she knew it was impossible for him to do so, and it was a comfort to see that his brother officers evidently thought but little of it.

"An awkward mistake, Miss Bridgeman," said Captain Talbot, another of Harry's brother officers. "I can assure you, none of us feel the least uneasy about Beringer; and remember, he is so popular, that if we had an idea there was likely to be anything more than a good laugh against him we should by no means take the thing so gaily. Bore for him, though, missing such a good ball as this."

"I don't know," chimed in Muddleton, who had overheard the conversation; "a man must be arrested for something. Always awkward when a charge is brought against you. A man may be perfectly innocent, but quite unable to disprove the charge brought against him!"

"Yes, it might be so," said Beatrice, impatiently, "but it's not very likely."

"Men have been hanged for murder, before now,



on circumstantial evidence," said Muddleton, sentimentously.

"You have no business to hint at Mr. Beringer being charged with such a crime as that," cried Beatrice, hotly.

"That's going rather far, before one of his brother officers," interposed Captain Talbot.

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Muddleton, now dimly conscious that he was putting his foot into it. "I'm only talking in the abstract. Pray don't suppose I'm suggesting anything personal."

Still, the ball was going all wrong for Miss Bridgeman; and though Beatrice was not aware of it—for somebody else also. One of Beatrice's favourite partners, a man deeming himself with much experience of the fair sex, said to one of his cronies, after a valse with the Squire's daughter:—

"Were you out with the West Clayfordshire, to-day, Jack?"

"Yes. Why so?" was the reply.

"Well, if Miss Bridgeman was out, too, and you had a fair run, I presume she wasn't in it."

"She was out, and we had a fair run, and she went much as usual," replied the other, tersely. "Why do you ask?"

"All I can say," rejoined the philosopher, "is, from the way she snapped at me, I thought she had been clean out of it. Nothing but an affliction of that sort would justify the crispness of temper she is displaying to-night."

Rose Rawlinson was also bitterly disappointed with the ball she had schemed so hard to compass. The Squire, on this occasion, had made no sign; it was probable that when he had done so, on previous



occasions, it had been at his daughter's prompting; and Beatrice had limits to her magnanimity. She could forgive having been worsted at Harrington Brook, she could scorn to take advantage of the hard necessity that had placed Bay Bella at her disposal, but she could not overcome a lurking jealousy which existed between herself and Rose, on the subject of Harry Beringer.

Rose had succeeded in persuading the good-natured wife of a neighbouring clergyman to chaperone her, as well as her own daughter, and the good lady had found her account in doing so, as Miss Rawlinson dutifully transferred as many of her own partners as she could to the parson's daughter; and Rose had, certainly, no cause to complain of an unfilled card.

Supper was over, and the ball at its height, when suddenly, some slight excitement was visible near the door, and the majority of the men, not dancing, speedily clustered round it like bees. It was quite evident that much hand-shaking and congratulation was going on. It so happened, Rose was near the door, waiting for a partner who had not yet come up from supper. Suddenly the group parted; and, through it, laughing and shaking and saying, "Thanks—thanks, the Major will tell you the whole story," came Harry Beringer.

"Oh, I am so glad," exclaimed Rose, as she extended her hand. "There have been dreadful rumours about you; and they all said you would not be here; but there's nothing the matter, is there?"

"Nothing further than that I've had my purse stolen under peculiar circumstances. It's a long



story—give me this valse, and I will tell it you.” And, in another second, Rose was whirling round the room on his arm.

By this time, the news of Mr. Beringer’s arrival had spread up to the more aristocratic end of the room, where Miss Bridgeman was seated. She had declined that valse, under the plea of fatigue, and, was sitting out by her mother’s side, voting the ball a decided failure, when she heard what had happened. Her face lit up, and she looked eagerly for Beringer in all directions. How glad she was she had refused to dance this time; surely he would come to her at once. Suddenly the group about her opened, and she caught sight of Beringer and Rose Rawlinson, as they whirled past.

Beatrice’s face flushed with indignation; so this was the way he kept his tryst. She who had longed for this ball only that she might meet him again—she who had been so distressed at hearing misadventure had befallen him—she to be thrown on one side for Rose Rawlinson, the daughter of one of her father’s tenants. The girl bit her lips with anger, to think she could have been made such a fool of. She had been fretting her heart out at his absence; and now that he had at last arrived, it was only to claim a valse with Rose. Oh, yes, he would come to her later perhaps, and claim the same favour at her hands. Let him! She would know how to answer such request.

The valse finished, and then, after some little delay—such delay as Miss Bridgeman had not quite anticipated—Mr. Beringer appeared before her.

“True to my tryst, Miss Bridgeman,” he said



gaily, "though I've fair excuse to offer for my tardy appearance."

"None fairer," she rejoined drily, as she coldly took the extended hand. "Pray make no excuses. I can easily comprehend the delay. A valse with Miss Rawlinson would be temptation sufficient enough to justify any man being a little behind time."

Harry Beringer felt that he had got himself into an awkward scrape. He knew that after the pact he had made with Beatrice at Gore Court just before he left, his first allegiance had been due to her at the Byster ball, but he had come across Rose on entering the room, and her pretty delight at his re-appearance had proved irresistible. "I don't know that you have any cause to twit me about that," he said after a slight pause, "I happened to meet——."

"Pray don't think I have any curiosity about your meeting, Mr. Beringer, nor the slightest disposition to what you call 'twit' you. I hear you have been placed in an unpleasant predicament, from which I heartily congratulate you on escaping from."

"I am afraid it is too late to hope you have a dance left for me," said Harry, who was now getting as nettled as herself.

"Quite so. I have done for this evening, and am only dying to hear that the carriage is ready."

"Good night, Miss Bridgeman," he rejoined, as he bowed over her hand. "You are the sole person in the room who has thought proper to manifest any belief in the charge brought against me—falsely, as you will see."

He turned away with a low bow as he spoke, and



knew perfectly well that his speech was unfounded and that his unlucky valse with Rose was the real root of his offending; but if they were to quarrel he thought he would take high ground, and take advantage of his opportunity.

"What is it Mr. Beringer has been accused of, father?" she said, as the Squire came up to tell her that the carriage was waiting.

"What, do you mean to say you haven't heard child what all the room is ringing with? Why, I saw you talking to him. Didn't he tell you?"

"No," she answered, with dilating eyes.

"Harry Beringer was arrested for murder, and for a few hours circumstances quite warranted the police in their belief. But come along."

"Murder," she muttered; "not true, of course. But if I had known, I don't think I would have been so hard upon him to-night."

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## CHAPTER IX.

### "THE NUGGET."

"WELL, my dear, how did you enjoy your ball?" asked Aunt Barbara, as Miss Bridgeman made a tardy appearance in the drawing-room after a pretence at breakfast in her own room.

"Don't ask me," she replied. "I do think it was the worst ball I ever was at in my life. That little minx, Rose Rawlinson, I've no patience with her. Her head is quite turned because some of the officers here have paid her a little attention, and the fuss



they made about Mr. Beringer was simply disgusting. Instead of having been merely taken up for a murder which he didn't commit one might have supposed he had committed some heroic action."

"A most curious case," remarked Aunt Barbara. "Your father was telling me all about it at breakfast. I don't wonder people talked about it, and though I don't suppose that he, for one moment, had any doubt about its ending all right, yet it was an awkward situation to be placed in. Still, I don't see that that made it a bad ball. I have known young people find much difficulty about something to talk about on such occasions."

"Nonsense, auntie," retorted the girl saucily. "My partners have always me, a subject I can always listen to with pleasure."

Aunt Barbara's eyes twinkled as she rejoined drily, "Ah! and they talked of Rose Rawlinson last night, I suppose. It does make a difference."

"How dare you say such things, auntie? I suppose you'll want to know next how Rose looked. She looked frightful; no she didn't, she looked too awfully lovely, and all the men were wild about her."

"And neglected you," said Miss Kurzon.

"No, indeed," replied the girl, with a toss of her head. "I had quite my share; but things went askew. I was put out. In fact, the ball didn't go to my liking, and so I say again, Miss Kurzon, it was a bad ball."

"I quite understand; never mind going into particulars, my dear. I suppose we shall have Mr. Beringer over to call in a day or two. I'm longing to ask him all about his adventure."

"Oh! I don't know," rejoined Beatrice carelessly.



"I suppose so; but I shall go and take a turn on the terrace before lunch, and see if that will blow the cobwebs out of my brain."

"I tell you what, Sara," Aunt Barbara remarked as the door closed, "she has had a tiff with young Beringer, and that is what was the matter with her ball. I don't suppose that it will come to anything. But if you and Ralph don't think Mr. Beringer an eligible son-in-law, I would not have him quite so much here if I was you."

"Nonsense. You surely don't think there's any danger of those two falling in love with each other?"

"I think much more unlikely things have happened, and am very much mistaken if Beatrice isn't inclined a little that way. At the present moment, remember, he is always over here, and pays her a good deal of attention."

Mrs. Bridgeman was a little put out at her sister's observations, but she knew from experience that Barbara's sharp eyes were to be relied upon in any case of this sort. It was not that either she or her husband had any objection to young Beringer personally; on the contrary, he was a great favourite, but at present he was only a subaltern, and though, as they all knew, he had expectations from his uncle at Plymouth, still, they might never be realised, but anyway Mrs. Bridgeman knew that there must be a great scarcity of ways and means at present to set up house upon, and in homely parlance she did not relish the idea of giving her daughter to a man who was unable to keep her. It were better, she thought, that such an incipient flirtation should be nipped in the bud, and determined to advise her



husband accordingly. Beatrice was young, and could afford to wait, if Mr. Beringer fancied her, let him come forward as soon as his position entitled him to.

But Mrs. Bridgeman was destined to be occasioned no uneasiness on this point. Considerably to the astonishment of both herself and Aunt Barbara, Mr. Beringer made no sign. He had called at Gore Court, but at an hour that a man so well versed as himself in the habits of its inmates, could make pretty certain of finding nobody at home. The Squire and Beatrice saw him constantly in the hunting field, when he was always excessively courteous and polite; but he no longer dangled, as had been his wont, by the side of Miss Bridgeman's bridle. Very sore about this was Beatrice; the one thing that consoled her was, that though he always rode up and spoke to Rose, he hung about her side no more than he did about her own. The men said Beringer rode straighter and better than ever, now he had given up spooning in the hunting field, which, as that philosopher who had attempted to account for Miss Bridgeman's shortness of temper at the Byster Ball explained, invariably spoiled a man's capacity for better things. As for the Squire, a hint from his wife had sufficed to put a stop to those genial off-hand invitations to dine and sleep at Gore Court, which he had been in the habit of so freely giving. When a little coolness springs up between people who have hitherto known each other well, it is astonishing how rapidly the chilliness increases. Mr. Beringer had quarrelled with Beatrice, and made no pretence to himself of not knowing why; but, he was not a little sur-



prised when he found, as he deemed, that it was a quarrel *à l'outrance*. A quarrel so much in earnest that she had persuaded her family to partially drop his acquaintance.

"Halloa, Harry; how is it you're not going to Gore Court this evening," asked Major Seaton, as he bustled into Beringer's quarters one evening an hour before mess-time.

"For the best of all possible reasons—I'm not asked, Major. I don't know how it is, but there's a coolness sprung up between me and the Gore Court people, and they've quite dropped me of late."

"Odd," rejoined the Major. "I must try to get to the bottom of this."

"Pray don't trouble yourself," cried Beringer, as Seaton left the room.

However, the Major was not to be denied, and took an opportunity of asking the Squire whether young Beringer had done anything to offend him or his family.

"It can't be, I'm sure, that you think anything of this ridiculous charge that has been preferred against him."

"Certainly not," replied the Squire; "who does? It has been all so thoroughly explained. No, Beringer is as nice a young fellow as ever I met. But, quite between ourselves, Seaton, he can't provide for a wife; and, therefore, I think it is just as well that he and Beatrice shouldn't see too much of one another at present.

Major Seaton could, of course, say no more; neither could he mention to Beringer why he was not asked to Gore Court as heretofore. And Harry, therefore, was left to his original theory that



Beatrice had so bitterly resented his not having claimed her for a dance, the moment he arrived at the Byster Ball, that she was resolved their old friendly footing should no longer continue.

Many men under these circumstances, if from no other motive than pique, would have at once ostentatiously prosecuted their flirtation with Rose Rawlinson, and, as we know, Harry Beringer oscillated strangely between the two girls, and could hardly as yet be said to be decidedly in love with either. He was a follower of Tom Moore's Epicurean creed that

“ When we are away from the lips that we love  
We have but to make love to the lips that are near.”

And as yet had most hazy ideas of matrimony. Even if he had, he knew that it was quite out of all reasonable possibility with Rose Rawlinson. His whole family would be up in arms. His uncle down by Plymouth would most certainly ignore him when he came to disposing of his estates, should he make such a marriage as that. And he had too much chivalry in his nature to make a fool of a girl like Rose. He thought that he could make Miss Rawlinson fond of him if he took the trouble, but then nothing but tears and disappointment could come of it; or, worse still, social ruin to her, if not to both of them. He knew quite well that if he saw much more of Rose, he could no more abstain from making love to her than a dram-drinker from the bottle; it was his besetting weakness, and he was quite conscious of it; he had more than once got into petty scrapes from this fatal facility of his for making love to every pretty



woman he came across. For the first time in his life he had been attracted simultaneously by two young ladies. And after some little wavering had no sooner decided that he was more in earnest about Beatrice Bridgeman than he had ever before been, than he found himself most distinctly cold shouldered. The temptation was great, but Harry Beringer, if reckless, was what his friends termed "straight," a term which, though it be slang, carries mighty significance among the youth of the present day.

Harry had, therefore, taken up a position of dignified neutrality with regard to either girl; was unfailingly courteous in his demeanour to both when he met them in the hunting field, but most carefully avoided being anything more, and it would have been hard to say now whether Rose Rawlinson or the Squire's daughter was the most discontented at the outcome of the Byster Ball. The delinquent in the meantime consoled himself by hunting three days a week, playing racquets on the intermediate days, and could now always be safely counted upon for the regimental rubber.

There were three members of the West Clayfordshire, who, despite the Master showed capital sport, voted hunting was nothing to what it was at the beginning of the season, but who still from sheer love of the thing were constant in their attendance when the hounds met their side, and who were found as much as ever to the fore in a smart gallop as if they had not a care upon their minds. Love affairs going askew may make a man's shooting do likewise, or interfere with a woman's lawn-tennis, but it makes both sexes ride remarkably



straight, probably with a view to terminating their broken lives by broken necks. By the way lawn-tennis has given great opportunity for the mingling of the sexes, but is it fate? it can't be the game; but why are its great lady exponents so much less charming than we expect to see them? Perhaps it is the dress. Anything more unbecoming than the attire of a lady in a champion tournament it is hard to conceive. It may be the game, still I have never seen but one lady who was both a good and graceful player.

About this time an event took place which was destined to have a wonderful influence on the fortunes of Gore Court, though as Aunt Barbara disdainfully described it at the time, "Ralph couldn't have 'clucked' more if it had been the birth of his first-born, and didn't indeed make half such a fuss when Reginald came into the world." One morning Bristow arrived up at the house with the intelligence that Golden Dream had dropped a fine colt foal, and the Squire was at once off to the paddocks in a state of high excitement. So far Ralph Bridgeman had experienced the fortunes of most men who commence the formation of a breeding establishment. Valuable brood mares, even when money is no object, can only be picked up by degrees, and the Gore Court stud shared the usual fate that attends the early days of all such establishments, that is to say their yearlings fetched low prices, and turned out of small account. Of "his bargain" the Squire had formed extravagant hopes, for which there were really no foundation, except the weakness so common to our nature. We all dearly love a bargain, and are always proportionately proud on



those rare occasions upon which we obtain one. There is something very titillating to our sagacity, that we picked out the stone that the builders rejected. Then again, Ralph Bridgeman had been not a little chaffed about thinking that clever people, who had parted with this mare to Cornflower as worthless for breeding purposes, were likely to be mistaken. Now let this foal turn out what it might, nobody could deny but what Ralph Bridgeman had really picked up, for forty pounds, a mare, from the blood that flowed in her veins, probably worth ten times as much. Then again Bristow, who had been busily engaged in hunting up the paternity of the coming foal, was delighted to find that it would be a rarely bred one. The stable from which Golden Dream had been cast, though somewhat incredulous and most certainly astonished upon hearing of the expected stranger, were quite clear about its paternity, and at once said, "That the foal would be the son of the Viking."

The manager of the stud from which Golden Dream had been sold, made no concealment of his chagrin at the mistake; the mare had been barren the year before, and to their belief was the same this, otherwise they would never have parted with her, much less for the very trifling sum Cornflower had given, and he wound up by offering Bristow three hundred for herself and her progeny when it should appear. This, it is needless to say, the Squire had rejected, but still there remained the comforting fact that the very people who had sold Golden Dream were anxious to buy her back, for seven or eight times the sum that he himself had given for her. Lowell says somewhere, that one of the highest



ambitions of humanity is the obtaining something, however small, for nothing, and this ambition is gratified in its highest sense by the picking-up of a genuine bargain. As Bristow and his master stand fondly criticising the equine infant, and indulging in dreamy prophecy as to how he will grow up, the Squire begins to indulge in visions of prospective Derbys and Legers, etc. Bristow interrupts his master's meditations by remarking:

"Well, sir, whatever he may turn out, we've never had such a rare bred 'un in the paddocks before. We shall have to be thinking about a name for him."

"Ah! a name!" ejaculated the Squire. "Yes, he'll want a name. Stop, I have it. By the Viking, out of Golden Dream—I shall call him The Nugget."

"And I sincerely trust he will turn out one, sir," said Bristow.



## CHAPTER XI.

### “ROSE DISAPPEARS.”

BEFORE the departure of Her Majesty's ——th had faded out of the minds of the good people of Warminster, another thing happened which exercised the neighbourhood n/t a little. Rose Rawlinson disappeared from the Lees, and her father and mother volunteered no explanation concerning it. They rather evaded being questioned on the subject, but if at all pressed replied drily, that she had gone to stay with friends in London. One thing was perfectly clear, that she had left Warminster quite openly, and her parents were fully aware of her intention in so leaving. Still there were wiseacres and scandalmongers in Warminster who shook their heads, and said that they always knew no good would come of the girl's flirtation with Mr. Beringer. That there were no grounds whatever for connecting her disappearance with the departure of the ——th regiment did not signify. That the girl had not left Warminster for a month after Mr. Beringer and his brethren in arms counted for nothing. The gossips said darkly, “that time would show that it was a bad day for the Rawlinsons when that Beringer chap crossed the threshold of the Lees.” Be that as it may, months rolled by, and nothing



Harry, from prudential motives, had determined to keep equally clear of Rose Rawlinson likewise. He knew the temptation to console himself for the rebuff he had received from Beatrice, by making love to Rose, would be irresistible if he went near the Lees. There is much safety to the fly in avoiding the honey-pot. "I shall only wind up by getting her into a deuce of a scrape, and myself too, most likely. I shall compromise her, she'll get talked about. No, there's only one thing for it, and that is to keep clear of her altogether."

This was all very well in theory, and did wonderfully well in practice while the hunting lasted, but with the spring time there crept a great dulness over Warminster, and Her Majesty's ———th were hard put to it how to amuse themselves. You cannot play racquets all and every day, be you ever so great an enthusiast, besides, horses must be exercised, and it is a great thing to have an object for one's ride. That half-dozen miles to Lees Farm and back was a very nice afternoon canter, and Mr. Beringer was further assisted in his folly by Mrs. Rawlinson.

"What's the use of bringing the girl up a lady," said that energetic matron, "if you don't give her the chance of marrying a gentleman. Rose don't get so many chances that she can afford to throw one away, therefore if that young Beringer chap is disposed to get sweet on her, well let him. She ought to know how to take care of herself, and not go getting soft on him before she is quite sure he is very soft on her;" and therefore Mr. Beringer found no restraint put upon his visits by Mrs. Rawlinson.



Was it to be wondered at that Harry, wiling away the tedium of those dreary spring days, and a man to whom woman's society in some guise was a necessity, found himself a constant guest at pretty Rose Rawlinson's tea-table. It was the old story. He was idling away his time, liking her, admiring her, but nevertheless playing counters against her gold; while she, poor child, dreamt they were growing all in all to each other. He knew that it was a mere poetical romance in his life, which might terminate at any moment. He honestly meant the girl no harm, and yet, though he knew what gossip would assuredly have to say about these constant visits of his to Lees farm, he had not strength of mind to discontinue them—and she? Well, Rose was no more blind to the risk she ran of laying herself open to the clamour of tongues than her admirer, but she loved him. She didn't know quite what was to come of it, but hoped that sooner or later he would ask her to be his wife, and that after the manner of fairy stories, they would "live happy ever afterwards." But remember that Rose was no fool or innocent of the world's ways, but simply, like her admirer, she preferred to enjoy the present, and shut her eyes to all the consequences of the future. One more thing, which, let storytellers preach what sermons they like about the self-sacrifice of women, came dear to her heart, and that was the consciousness of triumph over Beatrice Bridgeman.

She honestly loved Trixie, but nevertheless she could no more have foregone ousting her from Harry Beringer's affections than any one of her sex, from Cleopatra to the latest of London sirens. No



man can deny how self-sacrificing women can be, but when it comes to resigning an admirer to a rival, it is well to remember there are trials past feminine endurance, and that to do them justice they do not expect it of one another.

As might have been expected, it was not long before Harry Beringer's visits to the Lees provoked comment, and, as was pretty certain to be the case, Rose was the person whose conduct was most censured.

"That Rawlinson girl," said the feminine portion of the community, "always had given herself airs. It was the fault of the Bridgemans in great measure. If they had not ignored the girl's position, and taken her up in the absurd manner they did, she would probably have been well enough; now she thought herself a lady, and quite looked down on the young women of her own class. That Mr. Beringer was always dangling about her. What was old John Rawlinson about to allow it. He could not suppose that Mr. Beringer was going to marry the girl, not likely. Well, they didn't want to be ill-natured; they could only say they hoped no harm would come of it."

In due course the report of Beringer's visits to the Lees came round to Gore Court, and excited exceeding wrath in the breasts of the ladies of the establishment. Beatrice though sorely wounded, was much too proud to open her lips on the subject, and when directly referred to by her mother about it, she replied haughtily "it did not concern her what attentions Mr. Beringer thought fit to pay Rose. She was only sorry that the girl was fool



enough to encourage them, as it was not likely that Mr. Beringer could mean anything serious."

But the person who most angered Mrs. Bridgeman and Aunt Barbara was the Squire. He literally scourged them with scorpions; his lips were closed before Beatrice, but when he caught his wife and sister-in-law by themselves he scoffed bitterly at them, and vowed never again to interfere with the inclinations of young people for each other.

"You would have it Sara that women see these things so much quicker than we do. You were so afraid that young Beringer and Beatrice were getting too fond of each other. Why, bless my soul he was over head and ears with the other girl all the time."

"That's all nonsense, Ralph," would exclaim Mrs. Bridgeman, "I'm not at all clear that he was, at the time I spoke to you."

"Well, then all I can say is that your banishing him from our house drove him into it, and I'm very sorry for it. He was a nice young fellow, and she's a nice girl too, but no good can come of that flirtation. It will be sheer madness on his part to marry her, though she probably cannot see that the result could only be a bitter disappointment for her. If you and Barbara hadn't been so confoundedly diplomatic, I don't suppose young Beringer would ever have made up his mind as to which of the two girls he liked best, and no harm would have come of it."

In vain did Aunt Barbara stand stoutly to her guns, the Squire had got the whip hand, and he knew it. He really was annoyed that he had followed his wife's advice, and partially dropped



young Beringer. He saw that Beringer had resented it; he had taken a fancy to him, and now Beringer had quite dropped out of their circle; nothing except a coldly courteous salutation when they met ever passed between them. Besides Ralph Bridgeman's sarcasms there was another sting that honestly disturbed the tranquillity of the two elder ladies. They really were fond of Rose, and were quite of the Squire's opinion, that nothing but disappointment could come of her present flirtation. However, in the meantime, the wilful pair serenely went their own sweet way, and the lookers on could only wait and see what came of it.

Major Seaton had indeed ventured to remonstrate slightly with Beringer on the subject, but as that gentleman declined to discuss it, and curtly observed that he claimed the right to choose his own acquaintance, there was no more to be said. The Major knew you might as well attempt to meddle with Niagara as to reason with Strephon about his passion for Chloe. One person alone could have intervened in the telling of this love tale, and that was John Rawlinson; but in the first place, though he knew Mr. Beringer often called at his house, he by no means knew how often, and, secondly, he was so immersed in his own affairs that he had not much time to attend to anything else. Things were going very badly indeed with John Rawlinson; not with him especially. The farmers after many years of prosperity had suddenly fallen upon evil times. Agriculture seemed destined to become a most unprofitable occupation. At the present time, in spite of a most liberal abatement on the part of their landlords, the farmers found it



impossible to make both ends meet. John Rawlinson was no worse off than his neighbours, but he found it hard work to get hold of the requisite money to pay his labourers and carry on the necessary culture of the land, nor could anyone see how things were to come round again, the foreigner was simply underselling us in our own market, and though farmers might growl and cry aloud for a return to the duties on corn, practical men knew that you might as well talk of returning to the days of Stage Coaches.

"Well Mary," said Rawlinson, as he came in, towards the close of a fine day in April. "I can't make up my mind what to do. You'll be loth to leave the Lees, lass, and yet I'm afraid it will come to that. If things don't change, and I don't see any signs of it, I shall be stone broke next year. I can't make up my mind whether it will be best to give the Squire notice at once and throw up the farm next year, or to still carry on; I believe I'd best take out what I've got left, and start at something else."

"Oh! John, is it as bad as that?" said Mrs. Rawlinson, as she came over to him, "and what other business, my man, are you and I fit for. I'd be lost without my poultry and dairy."

"I don't know," replied John Rawlinson. "I suppose I'll have to carry on the old business on a small scale elsewhere. It's rather a come-down to turn from a big farmer into a small one, but we'd bear it better in a new neighbourhood than we would here, where we have always carried our heads high."

"You know best, John; but I'll be real sorry to leave the Lees. It's twenty-six years ago next



Whitsuntide since you brought me home here, John. All our children were born in this house; if we must, we must, but I shall cry bitterly the day I leave it."

A woman's heart clings fondly to her home and its belongings. That times were bad, and things going very much awry with them, Mary Rawlinson knew, but this was the first occasion upon which the fact that there was an imminent likelihood of their having to leave the Lees had been brought clearly before her. However, while the Warminster people are wagging their heads over the imprudent flirtation of Beringer and Rose Rawlinson, the Weird Sisters lift their fatal scissors and sever the thread of "love's young dream," or, in the more prosaic language of the War Office, Her Majesty's —th receive a letter commanding them to hold themselves in readiness to proceed to Aldershot at a moment's notice; a letter which evokes the varied feelings that always herald the departure of a regiment. There are many always to regret the corps who have made friends in its ranks, and are loth to lose them. There is always a certain section who did not get on with its officers, and trust to do better with the new comers; and there is yet another division of society who like a change. That the intelligence the regiment was under orders to leave Warminster was known all over the town within a very few hours of the Colonel opening his letter from the War Office, it is almost needless to say. Two women speedily were made acquainted with the news, and to each it brought a tug at her heart-strings. Beatrice Bridgeman had more than once ruefully regretted her behaviour to Harry at the



Byster Ball. She was right. She yet considered his allegiance had been due to her, and he had no business to ask another woman to dance till her prior claim had been satisfied. She had never meant to quarrel with him in earnest. She had never thought that he would vouchsafe her no opportunity of reconciliation. It was impossible for her to foresee Aunt Barbara's prophetic visions, nor had she the slightest idea of how much that dear old lady's advice had contributed to estrange her from Harry Beringer. Beatrice could not help thinking if it had not been for that foolish difference with Harry at Byster, those visits to the Lees, which were occasioning such scandal at Warminster, would have been paid to Gore Court. Very much of her father's opinion was Miss Bridgeman, although not quite arguing from the same premises.

But to Rose Rawlinson the tidings that the —th have got the order to march was a veritable shock. It brought her face to face with the problem as to how her flirtation must end, and she knew only two things, that she had got very fond of Harry Beringer and that she had grievous doubts of his asking her to marry him.

"Nonsense, mother, I can't bear to hear you speak of it like that," expostulated Rose in response to a sharp speech from her mother to the effect that she supposed Mr. Beringer would speak out now. "He couldn't expect to go hanging about a girl all the time, and then be off without saying what he meant by it." But for all that, Rose had strange misgivings nothing definite would be arrived at in her parting interview with Harry Beringer.



The order for the —th to march, which, in this instance, meant to take the rail, followed promptly on the letter of readiness, and Rose had not long to wait before she saw Beringer walking his hack up the lane which led to the Lees, to pay, what she knew very well, was his farewell visit.

“So you’re under orders to leave Warminster?” she exclaimed, as he entered the sitting-room. “Very unexpected, is it not?”

“Yes; we thought we were quite safe here till next autumn, but we’re off, and at very short notice. We march to-morrow.”

“So soon, Mr. Beringer. How we shall all miss you.”

“You will learn to do without me, Rose, much easier than I shall without you. I shall think often of the many pleasant hours I have spent in this room, and of the many good gallops we’ve had together, and, above all, I shall think of your own sweet self.”

“My own sweet self,” replied Rose, with a somewhat sickly attempt at merriment, “owns to being unfeignedly sorry you’re going.”

“Still, I’m not going so very far away,” rejoined Beringer. “Thanks to the rail, no place in England can be said to be very far from any other. I dare say I shall be often running back to Warminster.”

“You’ll be visiting at Gore Court most likely,” said Rose, just a little maliciously, for she knew very well what a coolness had sprung up between Beatrice and Mr. Beringer.

“No, I don’t think that is likely,” he replied. “I see as little of Gore Court now as you do.”

“Yes,” replied Rose, “they have given up asking



me there of late, and you are the reason, Mr. Beringer."

"I," cried Beringer. "I know they've pretty well dropped me, but I don't see because they're offended with me what that can have to do with you."

"Nonsense; you can't suppose Beatrice liked your being attentive to me. She was very angry with you at the Byster ball, because you asked me to dance before asking her. Of course she would include me also in her wrath, and what's more, be much slower to forgive me than she would you."

Now Beringer had certainly guessed all this, but he was a little taken aback to hear Rose discuss it so openly. But the girl was sore at heart and very bitter with her lot. She had grown really fond of Beringer, and was honestly very sorry that their pleasant intimacy was to be broken off. Her heart raged against Miss Bridgeman, because had she only enjoyed the advantage of Beatrice's position, she felt sure that Beringer would ask her to be his wife. She knew too that she had been much talked about of late on account of her flirtation with the young officer, in fact, her love affair was a tangled skein, the unravelling of which she could by no means compass.

"I'm awfully sorry, Rose," he said, after a pause, "that you should be punished for my iniquities, and yet, dearest, your own sweet face was the cause of them."

"Yes," said Rose, as she flashed a look of provocation at him from under her dark eyelashes, "but it is always we poor women upon whom the bigger share of the blame is visited. You go away and



leave us to bear the burdens you have laid upon our shoulders."

Harry Beringer was quick to respond to Miss Rawlinson's challenge; he was seated on the sofa beside her, and his arm glided round her waist as he murmured in her ear, "I tell you I shall often come back; you'll see me back again in Warminster before many weeks are over."

"I hope so, Harry," she replied, as she yielded to his embrace, "for I shall be very lonely without you."

His lips prevented further speech on her part, and Harry Beringer for the next half hour was still whispering the old old story into her willing ears, but though they parted with the warmest embraces, and though the tears welled up in Rose's dark eyes, yet she stood no more pledged to be Beringer's wife than when he had crossed the threshold.



## CHAPTER XII.

### RICE AND OLD SHOES.

Two years have glided by, and the sale of the Gore Court yearlings is steadily becoming more and more popular with the public. This last season in particular a flying two-year-old called the Nugget, the property of Mr. Clinton, but which had been bred at Gore Court, had swept the board, and called renewed attention to Mr. Bridgeman's blood stock. The Squire indeed was more wrapped up in his breeding stud than ever, and said that the paddocks were the only bit of land on the estate worth cultivating. Agriculture gave no signs of improving, and Ralph Bridgeman had been compelled to cut down his rents, year by year, till his income was reduced to little more than half of what it had been when Harry Beringer had been quartered at Warminster. The ——th had by this time been moved from Aldershot. The doom that Harry had feared long since had fallen upon them, and they had been ordered to the West of Ireland. Since then the Gore Court people had heard but little of them. Major Seaton, to whom they were usually indebted for all the news concerning their old friends in his corps, had not visited them this year, and further than that the Squire had seen Harry Beringer's



was seen or heard of pretty Rose Rawlinson. Although many of the officers of the ——th had assured their friends in Warminster, honestly at the time meaning what they said, that they should often come down there again, yet, as constantly happens, they none of them ever did, with the one exception of Major Seaton. He came down for a fortnight about Christmas to stay with his old friend Ralph Bridgeman, and from him of course the Gore Court people heard of Mr. Beringer, but of his doings there was little to tell, further than that he was with the regiment, and that was all. It is true the Squire took an opportunity of informing the Major of the scandal there was afloat about Rose Rawlinson, but Seaton strenuously denied that Harry Beringer had the slightest hand in Rose's disappearance. "It is hardly possible," continued the Major, "that if she were with him it could by any means be kept a secret from the regiment, and such a thing has never even been whispered. I have no doubt that Harry didn't behave very well to her, but that's no reason for making him out much worse than he is."

Two or three days after Rose had left Warminster Bay Bella was sent up to the Court, and almost immediately afterwards John Rawlinson gave the Squire due notice that he should throw up the Lees next Lady-day. Ralph Bridgeman was very loth to part with his old tenant; he pointed out that he had already made an abatement of rent, said that he had no wish to be hard on any tenant of his during the present hard times, that he was perfectly prepared to give the question of a still further abatement fair consideration. John Rawlinson



thanked him, but shook his head. "It's no use Squire," he said, "You're as good a landlord to farm under as any one. I've held the Lees for more than a quarter of a century and don't deny but what I've done well in it till of late, but it's just beating me now. I don't see how farmers are to get on at all. I'm very sorry to leave the old place, but it's best to go while I've something left, and I'm afraid you'll find that more of them will have to follow my example."

Ere the year was over, the Squire found Rawlinson to be a true prophet. He had three or four good farms, besides the Lees, the holders of which not even a further abatement of ten per cent. could persuade to remain. They all told the same story as Rawlinson; they were sorry to go, but there was no longer a living to be got out of the land.

Clayfordshire, indeed, was one of the counties upon which the agricultural depression pressed hardest. Its inhabitants were fain to confess there was no money in the county; the landlords found their incomes reduced to one half, to say nothing of hundreds of acres thrown into their own hands, the farmers were stone broke, and instead of dining jollily together on the market-day, contented themselves with bread and cheese and a glass of ale. Those days of cheery dinners, when the salmon cost half-a-crown a pound, when the best of everything was on the table, and a pretty liberal allowance of port was consumed afterwards, "for the good of the house," were gone! and the bluff free-handed boisterous farmers of former times were succeeded by a lot of sad-eyed, anxious looking men who saw ruin creeping steadily upon them. That all this



naturally affected the gaiety of the county was only natural. People can't keep open house on narrow means, and when economy is the order of the day, it is the luxuries of life that first disappear. The West Clayfordshire hounds that season were but poorly supported, the gentlemen had, in many cases, been compelled to reduce their studs, and had but one horse where they had been wont to have two, while, as for the farmers, their hunters had come mostly to the hammer, and, exclusive of their farm horses, the bulk of them had reduced their studs to the one necessary "trapper." Beatrice Bridgeman complained bitterly what a dull winter it was. The new regiment was by no means so popular as the ——th. The latter had always sent forth a goodly contingent of horsemen when the hounds met within any reasonable distance of Warminster. But the new comers did not hunt; in fact, Warminster voted them a very slow lot compared with their predecessors.

A person who was, perhaps, seriously uncomfortable this winter was Aunt Barbara; she was very fond of her niece, and she could not help noticing a decided change in her. It was not that Beatrice moped, or anything of that sort, but she took her pleasure so much more sedately. The bright, lively girl of last winter seemed to have been replaced by quite a grave young lady. She hunted as often as ever, and rode as well; with Sultan and Bay Bella in the stable she had never been better mounted, but beautifully as the latter carried her, Beatrice was fain to confess she could not resist an occasional twinge when she thought that she had deprived Rose of her favorite; as far as health went there



was no cause to be uneasy, but there could be no doubt that the high spirits which had originally characterised her were considerably toned down. Aunt Barbara carefully noted this fact, and in her heart wished she had bitten her tongue out before giving her sister that hint about Mr. Beringer. What business, she asked herself, had she to interfere in the matter at all? Those sort of things were always better left to right themselves. To do her justice, Aunt Barbara was no mischief-making spinster, and most heartily now wished she had never meddled in her niece's flirtations. The Squire too, began to look harassed and anxious. It is all very well to say a man who is left with something like four thousand a year is not much to be pitied, but when that man has been used to spend double that amount all his life, and, in addition to that, suddenly finds himself with several farms thrown upon his hands, all allowed to run waste, it is not surprising that he gets anxious about money matters, and hardly knows where to lay his hand upon a sovereign. What the farmers had felt in the first instance had now come home to himself. To go in for farming requires no small amount of capital, and though the Squire, like most country gentlemen, had a very competent knowledge of the business, yet it was not based upon that thrifty management which the present circumstances so urgently compelled. One gleam of sunlight alone dawned upon the Squire in his difficulties, and that was that the Gore Court yearlings had fetched a better price than they had ever done yet. And not only that, but both the Squire and Bristow considered that they had a



most promising lot of foals for next year, the gem of which was The Nugget, and about this foal the Squire and his stud groom held many anxious confabulations.

"He grows a real beauty, Bristow," exclaimed Ralph Bridgeman, one morning, as they stood looking the young thing over. "I don't want to part with it. He'll turn out a real clipper, mark me—and, think of the blood."

"Keep him, sir," rejoined Bristow, "and, in twelve months' time, send him to Newmarket."

"No, that's no use," rejoined the Squire; "when you send an odd horse up to one of those public training stables, it's just a toss up whether they take a fancy to him or not. If they don't, they won't trouble their heads even to see if he is good for anything; they just put him to lead-work, or something of that sort. Why, I recollect Tom Clinton sending a couple of colts to Wrenton's; he never had either of them fit to run as two-year olds Clinton, who fancied the colts, took them away in great wrath; got hold of a private trainer, and the next year, won the Two Thousand, with one, and the Derby, with the other. No, no, Bristow, I'll have none of that—and yet, I do not want to part with the colt."

"Well, sir, what do you think of this?" exclaimed the stud groom. "You've lots of racing friends; how about leasing the The Nugget for his racing career; to come back to you when that is over?"

"By Jove! the very thing," exclaimed the Squire. "I'll write to Tom Clinton about it to-night. Tom, I know, will see that every jus-



tice is done him. Very good idea of yours, Bristow."

In due time Ralph Bridgeman received a letter from his old friend, saying that there was plenty of time to think about it; but that, in the course of the following year, he would manage to run down to Gore Court, and take a look at "the young un'." "You used to be a fair judge, Ralph," the letter went on:—"I can only say—if I like his looks, as I've little doubt I shall, The Nugget shall go up to my stables next autumn, and be put through the mill. If I'm satisfied, I will lease him from you with pleasure. The exact terms we will settle later on."

The Squire was delighted with this epistle. He was far too sanguine a man to dream of disappointment; and, really, the Gore Court stud gave promise of becoming a paying concern. This would enable him to keep his pet, "the pick of the basket, the pride of the shop," and share in all the glories he felt sure awaited him. For, like many another man of his hopeful temperament, Ralph Bridgeman already pictured The Nugget as a winner of the triple crown, albeit he was, as yet, not even entered for the trio of famous three-year old races.

"It's an odd thing, sir," said Bristow, one morning, to his master, just about Christmas time, "but the Wrentons are wonderful keen about getting Golden Dream back again. I've just had another nibble from them—they've wrote to say they're good to give a thousand for her and her foal."

"The devil they have!" exclaimed the Squire.

"Here's the letter, sir," rejoined Bristow, as he



handed it to his master. "I asked their head lad what made 'em so keen about it, and he told me they thought no end of Golden Dream's blood; would never have parted with her, if they had thought she would have bred, and that old Sam Wrenton, the father—the old man, you know, sir—has a curious superstition about the buying or selling of an unborn foal. Didn't you ever hear the old country saying, Squire?—

‘To sell the unborn  
Is like burning the corn.’

which, of course, means selling long before you can deliver;—means taking a very reduced price for whatever the stuff may be—live stock or grain. But, old Sam interprets it different. He thinks to sell an unborn foal is to part with a flyer, and would never have done it if he'd known. Now they are all mad to get back the mare, on account of the blood; and old Sam—well, he's wild, to get back the foal on account of this here belief of his."

"Well, Bristow, they won't. We've our superstitions, too, haven't we, and believe The Nugget will turn out a flyer—don't we?"

"It's looking a long way for'ard, sir; but I honestly think he will," rejoined Bristow.

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## CHAPTER X.

### A FOND FAREWELL.

By the end of the hunting season the estrangement between Mr. Beringer and the Gore Court people was complete. That gentleman had much too good an opinion of himself to kotoo to any people in the land, be they ever so great. A good-looking, popular fellow, he was one of Society's spoilt favourites. He had the *entrée* of far too many good houses not to be able to indulge himself in airs. The Bridgemans had taken him up warmly to start with, and he had become quite an *ami de la maison*. Since his quarrel with Beatrice he considered they had pointedly dropped him. He had no idea of being on what he called such beck and call terms with anybody; so when invitations did come from Gore Court they were invariably met with polite refusal. Now this was not at all what Ralph Bridgeman had meant. At his wife's instigation, who, in her turn was inspired by Aunt Barbara, he had thought it advisable not to have Mr. Beringer about the house quite so much as he had done, but still he had not the slightest intention or wish to drop his acquaintance altogether; however, it had now dwindled down to little more than interchange of bows when they met. Since the Byster Ball Harry Beringer had never set foot in Gore Court.

In the first sting of his quarrel with Beatrice,



name in the Gazette, as a Captain, they knew nothing of him.

The Rawlinsons, too, had vanished, and made no sign. What had become of John Rawlinson and his wife was unknown in the neighbourhood of Warminster. Rawlinson had sold off his stock, wished his neighbours good-bye, and said simply that he had not as yet made up his mind as to where he was going, but that the Lees had beat him, he could no longer get a living in West Clayfordshire; and since that none of his old friends had ever come across or heard of him. Rose, too, had considerably disappointed those scandal-mongers who had so persistently maintained that it would all come out some of these days. Either there was nothing to come out, or the secret was well kept, at all events the gossips of Warminster were no wiser than when the girl had so mysteriously disappeared from their ken.

But one morning Beatrice received a letter which astonished her not a little.

“DEAR MISS BEATRICE,” it ran—

“You will be surprised to hear from me after all this time, and it maybe wonder why I never came to wish you good-bye, but I should almost think your own heart would tell you the reason. I was properly punished for my flirtation, but still it was not altogether my fault. If you had not dealt so harshly with Mr. Beringer at the Byster Ball, it would never have happened. As it was he amused himself with me, but he loved you all the time. That I did my best to detach him from you I freely admit. I had no trouble in



making him flirt with me, and we had a scene to wind up with ; but I have never seen or heard from him since, nor did he, I fancy, ever make the slightest effort to discover what had become of me. As for my leaving the Lees, that is easily accounted for. We were all to leave shortly, because father could no longer get a living out of it. Times were getting very bad, and after the education I had had, I thought I ought to do something for myself. I had grown sick to death of Warminster and its neighbourhood where I knew I was now talked about, either pitied for having been left ‘all forlorn,’ or laughed at for being such a fool as to suppose Mr. Beringer ever meant anything. It did not much matter which, either was maddening to a nature like mine. And what was worse there was a spice of truth in it. I did cling to the hope that Mr. Beringer would ask me to marry him. When he wished me good-bye with those words unspoken, then I knew that my dream was at an end.

“I have often longed to make you this confession, but somehow have lacked the courage, and am only emboldened to now by the fact that I am going to be married. I took a situation in the country, as governess, when I left Warminster, and it has ended in my having promised myself to the doctor of the parish. He is a very nice fellow, with a large and rapidly-increasing practice, can give me a good home, and as you know I have always been accustomed to a country life, and George holds forth the prospect of an occasional scamper with the hounds in the winter-time. Pray write and forgive me, Miss Beatrice, that is, if you think you have anything to forgive ; we have known each other since



we were mere children, and I should not feel happy if I was married without having your best wishes.

“Most sincerely yours,  
“ROSE RAWLINSON.”

“P.S.—Don’t please tell anyone but the Squire Father has got a market-garden down by Brentford and is doing well, but it is a sad come down after the Lees.”

Beatrice Bridgeman was not the girl to reject an appeal of this sort.

Besides did not that letter carry balm in it to a heart sorely wounded, “he amused himself with me but *he loved you* all the time.” Ah did he, thought Beatrice—should she ever see him again? and then the girl’s face flushed as she thought how much she still cared for one who probably had no longer a thought for her. But it was a very pretty letter of congratulation that went forth from Gore Court in reply, duly to be followed by handsome *cadeaux* from the Squire, his wife and Aunt Barbara. Still nothing touched Rose so much as Beatrice’s own present, and when her old mare, Bay Bella, arrived, the day before the wedding, with her mane plaited with white satin ribbons, and two boxes of hunting paraphernalia, including everything from a set of clothing with her initials R. D to a riding habit by Doré, Mrs. Rose Drayton that was about to be, fairly sat down and indulged in a real good cry over her old favourite and the merry days of yore in West Clayfordshire.





A couple more years roll by and Warminster and its neighbourhood opine that Miss Bridgeman like her Aunt Barbara is not a marrying woman. She has declined one or two eligible offers, and seems contented now with her home life and the sport afforded by the West Clayfordshire, and yet it's strange, say the Warminster people, that so pretty a girl as Beatrice Bridgeman remains unwed. One thing that interests Beatrice much is the stud farm, and it would be hard to say whether the Squire or his daughter took most pride in the sale of the Gore Court yearlings. It has become one of the most noted sales of the year, and the average always increasing bids fair ere long to put it at the very top of the tree. The Nugget has given it a great lift, for though he failed to win the triple crown, there are few racing men who have any doubt but that he ought to have done so. He won the Two Thousand easily, an attack of influenza, although not bad enough to prevent his starting, virtually settled his chance at Epsom, while on Doncaster Town Moor he disposed of his antagonists in a canter.

"Half the stakes he wins. I pay all expenses, and he's yours again, when I've done with him," had been Tom Clinton's pretty proposal, after he had satisfactorily tried the Nugget as a yearling, and a very profitable bargain it had proved to both lessor and lessee. And now Ralph Bridgeman, accompanied by his wife and daughter, are at Ascot to see the Nugget compete for "the Cup."

"He can't lose it, Ralph, if he only gets safe down the hill," says Tom Clinton enthusiastically in the paddock. "He's fit as fiddles, but it's no use



denying, he has dicky fore legs. I think they'll pull him through to-day; but it will be a question every time he runs now, whether he don't crack in the race. Still, he's that game if it was close to home he'd win on three legs. He ought to be a clinker at the stud."

The paddock is thronged and numerous are the hearty greetings exchanged amongst the gay crowd who have come to take stock of the competitors for the Gold Cup. Miss Bridgeman and her father were anxiously scanning a great strapping bay four-year old with bandaged legs that is pacing majestically round and round in a circle.

"He's a grand horse, papa, and looks as if he could carry sixteen stone to hounds with ease."

"'With a back and with loins that would carry a house,  
And with quarters to lift him half over the town.'"

sang a voice behind them. "Ah! or Harrington Brook either," continued the singer, dropping into prose.

"Captain Beringer," exclaimed Miss Bridgeman, as she turned and met the laughing eyes of that gay linesman."

"Yes," replied Beringer, as he raised his hat, "I've escaped from the wilds of Erin for a brief period, and one must have had two years' soldiering in that country to thoroughly appreciate a run in England." "If I mistake not, Mr. Bridgeman," he continued, as he shook hands, "The Nugget is one of your breeding."

"A son of the very mare that I bought when you were in Warminster."



"Yes, don't you recollect our walking down to the paddocks to see what, in my impertinence, I always called papa's bad bargain; the Pride of the Paddock we call her now."

"Ah!" said Ralph Bridgeman, laughing, "it turned out the best deal that ever I made. This is probably The Nugget's last season racing, and then he comes back to me for stud purposes."

"And a rare sire he ought to make. He is a grand looking horse, and grandly bred. I hope Sultan is all well, Miss Bridgeman."

"Yes," replied Beatrice, with a coquettish smile, "but I should have thought you would have been more likely to enquire about Bay Bella."

"Ah! I recollect hearing just before I left that she had gone into your stable. I suppose you have her now?"

"No, indeed," replied Miss Bridgeman.

"Given her away? A most noble present! Might I ask who was the lucky recipient?"

"An old friend of yours," replied Beatrice, "and I gave her Bay Bella on her marriage. I knew nothing I could give her would please her so much."

"I hope she has married well and happily. When did it take place?"

"Close upon two years ago. I have only seen her once since, and then she came to see me in London, looking handsomer than ever. Her husband is a doctor with a capital practice, and so Rose gets a run up to Town for a fortnight now and again. The Rawlinsons, as you probably don't know, left the neighbourhood of Warminster just after you did."



"Yes," said Beringer, "Seaton told me all about that. He commands us now, you know."

"Come along and see the race, Beatrice," suddenly interposed the Squire. "It's just possible this might be the last year he will ever run. Won't you come too, Beringer? You will see it from the top of our drag as well as anywhere, and we'll give you some lunch afterwards."

They made their way out of the paddock and across the course, and soon caught sight of the little tricoloured pennon, which marked the coach in which the Squire and his party had come down. By the time they are comfortably established on the roof, the horses are cantering down to the post. There are only six runners, but they are all more or less celebrities. The Ring takes a slight shade of odds, though upon previous form it is as Mr. Clinton remarks, "a certainty for him, bar accidents."

A few minutes more and they come past the stand for the first time all in a cluster, and run till they reach the top of the hill. Here Falling Star, in the well known cherry and black cap, tears to the front, and brings the whole flight down the incline a cracker, with the exception of the Nugget who is left so far behind, that a cry is heard from the Ring of "The favourite's beat; the favourite is out of it."

"Oh! papa we're beat," cried Beatrice, who is watching the race closely through her glass.

"Not quite yet, I think, Miss Bridgeman," said Beringer, "though Jameson is lying almost dangerously out of his ground. Still I don't think the leg has gone yet. I've been so much in Ireland



lately that I never saw The Nugget run but once, and that was in the Derby, when he wasn't fit, but I've always heard that he's a horse with a tremendous turn of speed. Still it does look as if he would never catch his horses. Ha! he's down the hill at last, and Jameson is beginning to set him going in earnest. Look Miss Bridgeman! See how The Nugget is creeping up to his horses in the Swinley Bottom. By Jove! he'll be with them yet by the turn into the straight.

"Have you much money on him, Captain Beringer," suddenly enquired the girl.

"I laid a thousand to seven hundred," was the nonchalant reply.

Miss Bridgeman said nothing, but marvelled greatly that a gentleman of his moderate means, should dare to bet so boldly.

Harry Beringer was right. At the Swinley turn The Nugget ran up to his horses, and they were no sooner fairly in the straight than he settled his field in half a dozen strides, and coming on with the lead landed the Gold Cup in the commonest of canters.

They were a very merry luncheon party, as it was natural they should be. Commend me to that meal when the partakers thereof have all had a good race. It is astonishing how the mind overflows with human kindness under those circumstances and how marvellously far the smallest of jokelets go with such an auditory. Ere it was over Beringer had ascertained where the Bridgemans were staying in town, had received Beatrice's permission to call, and had further accepted a somewhat indefinite invitation to stay at Gore Court,



and have another shy at Harrington Brook with the West Clayfordshire.

"Seaton told me," muttered the Squire to himself, "that Beringer had inherited all his uncle's property near Plymouth, and was worth something like three thousand a year. If they do fancy each other, it would do very well now."

Ah! if Aunt Barbara could only have known, she would have said men are subtler than women when it comes to match-making. But the Squire had no intention of taking the women-folk into his confidence.

The Nugget made but one more appearance on a race-course. He came out for the Cambridgeshire with 9 stone 10 pounds on his back, and essayed in vain, like some two or three flyers, to carry it to victory up "that heart-breaking hill." Many good judges backed him, and he answered gamely to his jockey's call at the finish, but the crushing weight told. He died away in the last few strides, and could only finish at the heels of the leaders. Like Gladiateur and Isonomy, he flattered his backers for the moment, and then once more demonstrated the old axiom, that *weight will tell*. It was decided then that his standing another preparation was so doubtful that he was at once relegated to the stud, and reigned for the remainder of the Squire's life-time as the honoured sultan of the Gore Court *haras*. In this capacity he proved as great a success as he had been on the race-course, and the "Squire's bargain" indirectly proved worth ten thousand a-year to him till he died, and Reginald, his son, took up the sceptre.

Is it necessary to say more? Of course, Harry



Beringer arrived with a couple of hunters early in the winter at Gore Court, and paid a visit of unconscionable length. The light was back in Beatrice's eyes again, and her laugh was as merry and frequent as of yore. Whether she negotiated Harrington Brook again, this deponent is not prepared to testify; but that something quite as satisfactory was negotiated between her and Harry Beringer one day when the sun shone bright, when there was a crackle of frost in the air, and the drops on the hedgerows shone like diamonds, he is quite prepared to declare.

The bells of Warminster Cathedral rang merrily out one summer's day in the following year, and in a little shower of rice, old shoes, tears, and good wishes, Captain and Mrs. Beringer drove away from Gore Court on their honeymoon.

Mr. Muddleton was heard to express much surprise at the shedding of tears at a wedding. He presented Beatrice with a magnificent bracelet, and after the breakfast was heard to declare that "he had made his mind up." Whether that was merely the effects of champagne, or whether Aunt Barbara had also made up hers, but in a contrary direction I can't say, but that Aunt Barbara still rejoices in the titular appellation of Miss Kurzon is beyond dispute.

THE END.



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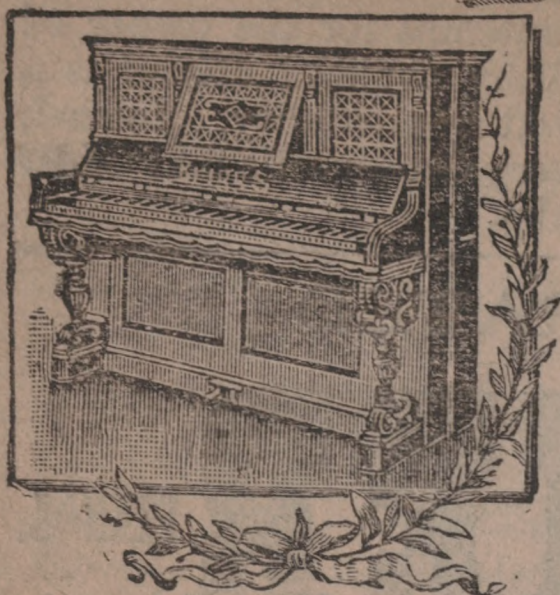
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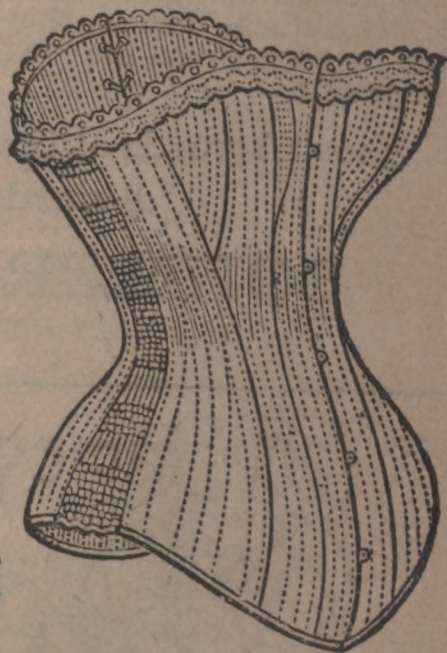
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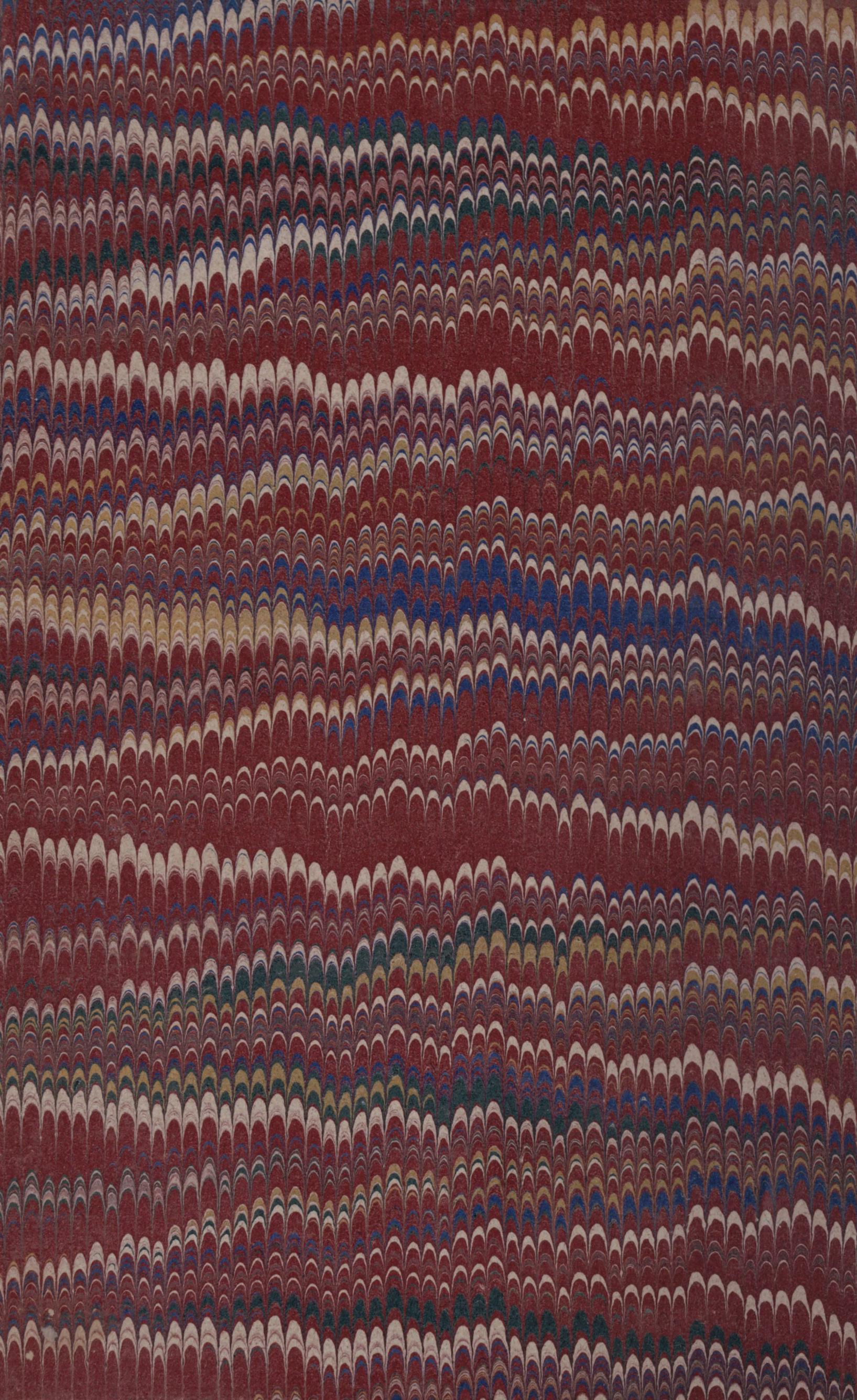




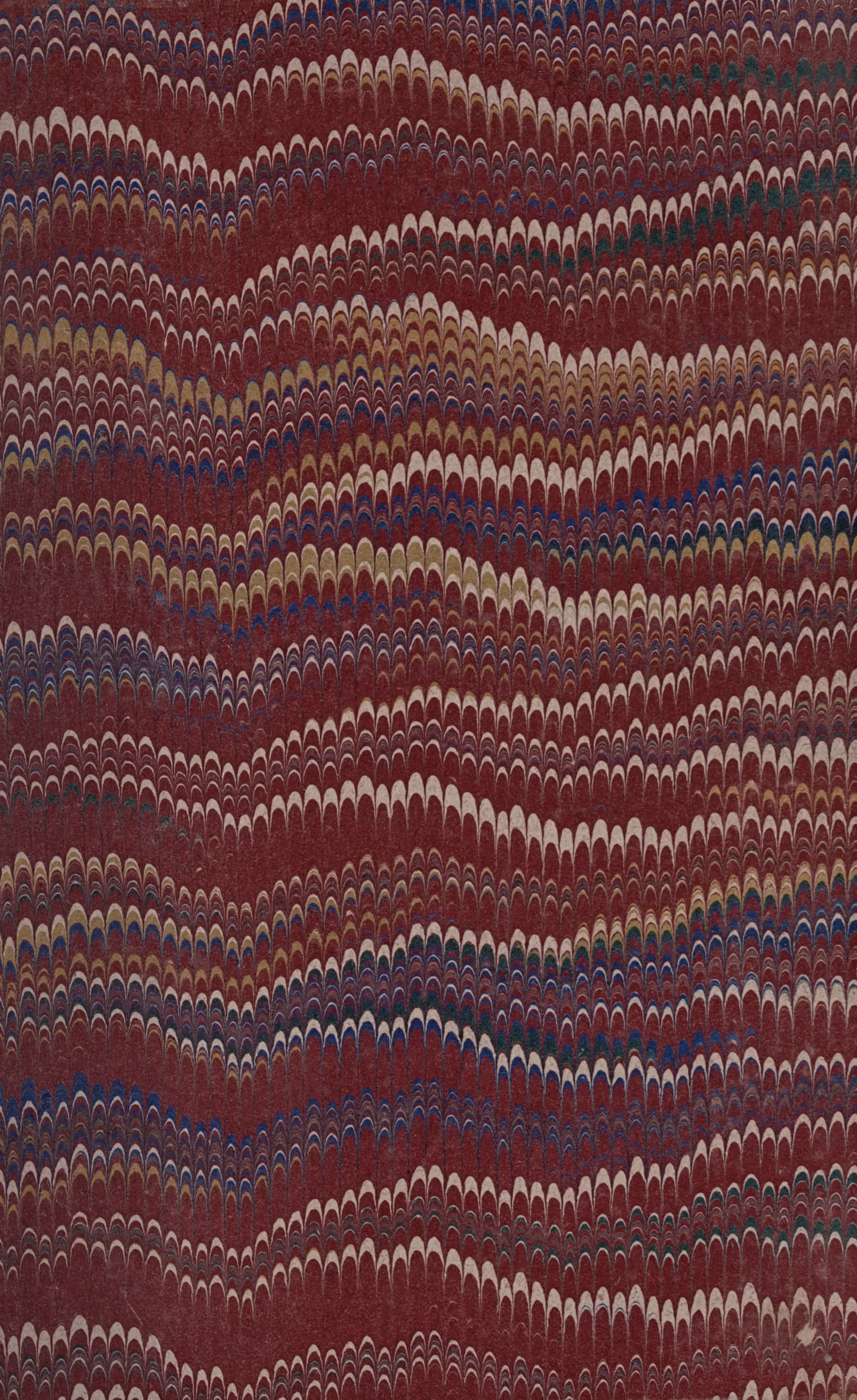














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